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The Creature From Cleveland Depths

By **Fritz Leiber**

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Plague of Pythons

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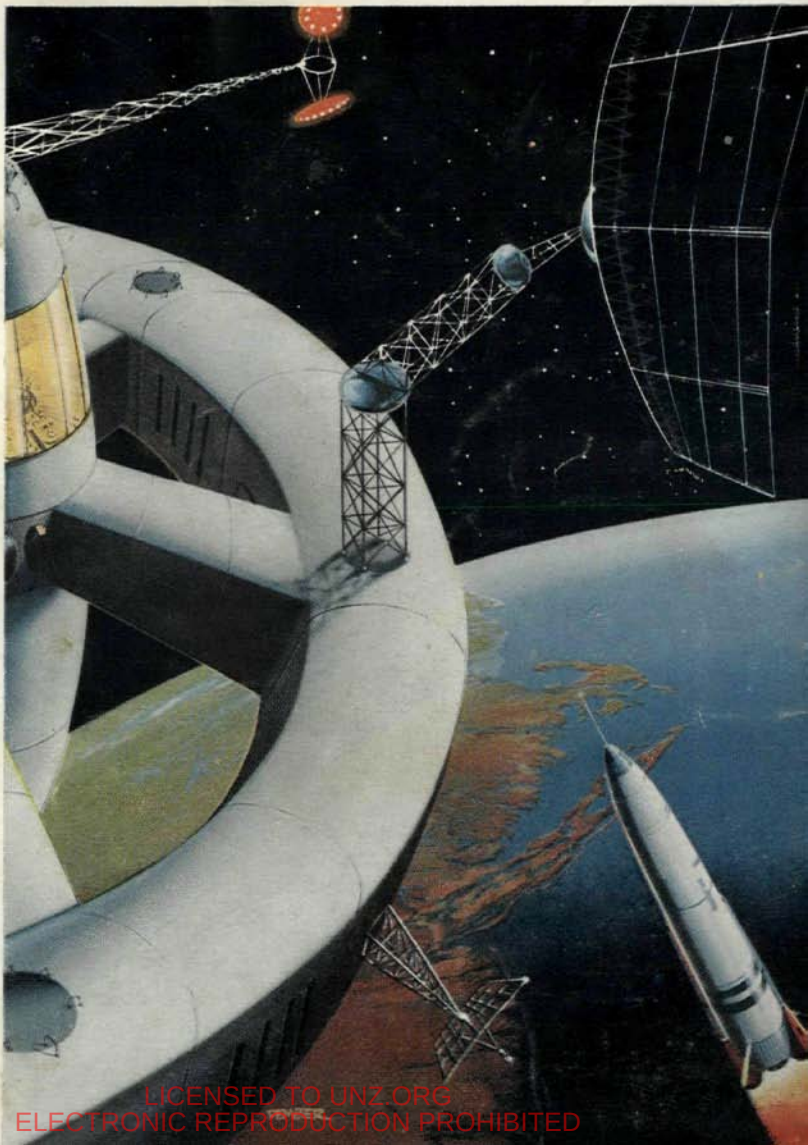
Latest Word on the Space Station

A Science Fact Article

By **Willy Ley**



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COUPLE months back, in the earliest stages of Seattle's Century 21 World's Fair, the management took notice of the fact that when you speak of Century 21 you are automatically speaking of science fiction, whether you know it or not, and scheduled a panel discussion on the subject. The principal guests were Ray Bradbury and Rod Serling. Since this was proposed as a full-scale *kulturfest* (admission $2.75, put on in a hall that seats 3,000 people) we thought it worth your while and ours to ask Our Man in Seattle, F. M. Busby, to attend and relay the information.

We did; he did; here is his report:

The panel was eventually announced as *Science Fiction, Ghosts and Freud in Novels, Television, Stage and Films in the Space Age.* The moderator was Mr. William Kelley, West Coast editor for a book publishing firm. Mr. Kelley began by stating that he knew nothing about science fiction and did not know what he was doing here. The first panelist to be introduced was Mr. Lowell Hawley, Chief Writer for the Walt Disney Studios. Mr. Hawley began by stating that he knew nothing about science fiction and didn't know what he was doing here; that made two honest men so far. (At this point a muted chorus was heard from scattered points in the crowd: "What are *we* doing here?" No answer was forthcoming.) It must be said for Mr. Hawley that he gave lucid answers concerning movies with which he was familiar, and that when he had nothing to say he

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refrained from saying it. When asked a general question along the lines of, "What do you think the future will be like?" Mr. Hawley stated that in his opinion, "People in the future will still be interested in the same basic things, though perhaps from a new perspective" . . . a position hard to fault, and quite in keeping with the motif of the occasion.

Next came the meat course. Mr. Ray Bradbury is an excellent speaker and a provocative thinker, and he was by no means having an off day. First he stirred up the animals with: "I know the least science of any science-fiction writer and I'm proud of it." Ten-year-olds, he says, tell him: "You know that last story of yours? The way that spaceship in it works? UH-uh!" But, he says, he isn't about to rewrite for ten-year-olds!

Then he got down to business. The space age, he said, is the single most important step ever taken by mankind. The next fifty years will change the pattern of our lives more than did the Renaissance. The movement to space is "a religious movement in the truest sense of the world . . . Man will pass the gift of life on to other planets, and so will achieve continuity."

Mr. Rod Serling, the final member of the panel, is a very personable young man who has a warm way with an audience. He has not been around science fiction very long and is the first to admit it. After discouraging his hearers with a standard "science fiction today is science tomorrow" gambit, Mr. Serling won them back by telling Mr. Bradbury: "You wrote this stuff and developed it *before* it became popular. Johnny-come-latelies like me have a lot to thank you for." Further than that, Mr. Serling displayed a fine, friendly touch for audience empathy and a familiarity with the science-fiction field comparable to Hugo Gernsback's. In fact, Mr. Serling's views of science fiction were very much in accord with those expressed by Mr. Gernsback over many years, with emphasis on prophecy, education and inspiration of the reader. He was gratified to be able to say that science fiction is at last becoming "respectable." Cheers did not drown him out, but his heart is obviously in the right place . . . namely inside his ribcage, where it's safe.

AFTER these opening remarks there was a sort of discussion among panelists and moderator, from which some (approximate! — taken by pencil in the dark) notes follow:

Moderator: What is there now to write about in science fiction?

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Bradbury: The space age is only beginning. The distance to the sun is less than that from one ear to the other; *this* is what we will always be exploring.

Serling: TV has not even scratched the surface.

Hawley: Do you write to entertain — to educate — what's your purpose?

Mr. Serling allowed that entertainment is a package deal, which can educate or have a point of view . . . or not. Mr. Bradbury cited Verne as inspiring inventions (submarine) and explorers (Admiral Byrd), and noted how space technology had come to involve religious matters, e.g., Pope Pius XII officially approving space travel in 1956.

Bradbury: America is the most blasphemous nation in all history. We not only question the natural order of things, we change it and set it aside. . . . I think that we are direct extrusions of God, who wants to perceive Himself through us.

Moderator: What about censorship in science fiction?

Bradbury: You can get away with murder. Even in TV, with a purely science-fiction story you have very little interference. They don't know what you're talking about.

Serling: Social commentary can go into science fiction that no one would dare to try straight.

From the audience: Is mankind prepared to go into space and meet nonhuman intelligences which might be housed in revolting shapes?

Bradbury: Humanity is a concept. It has nothing to do with appearance.

Kelley: We're not ready. Until we get this world straightened up, why go anywhere? . . . We are *sick*. Take an example of one of our jokes: "I have this Father Damien doll. You wind it up and set it on the table — and it *rots*."

Bradbury: We are never ready. We go anyway, as soon as we are able.

With all due respect to Mr. Kelley and Mr. Hawley, it is interesting to speculate what the results might have been if Mr. Bradbury had been placed on a panel (at $2.75 a head admission!) composed exclusively of people who knew what he was talking about. Mr. Serling showed up well for a self-admitted Johnny-come-lately . . . but considering all the West Coast talent that could have been available, the heart drips green for the audience that expected four distinct and informed points of view of science fiction to be presented.

Doubtless the producer was most sincere in feeling that a Disney writer and a book editor would draw the "general public"

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into attendance to this crackpot "Science Fiction Panel" that he had somehow agreed to produce. They never seem to learn do they? —F. M. BUSBY

WITH honorable, and rare, exceptions . . . they never do. We agree to this with a certain amount of emotion. One of the peripheral duties of a writer and/or editor is making an occasional public appearance via TV, radio, women's club or PTA. We have often noted the embarrassed half-smile which is the standard expression on the face of the program chairman or program host who doesn't quite know what to say to, or about, these nuts who write this Buck Rogers stuff. You can see on his face what is passing through his mind: Obviously there must be something about what this fellow does that will interest at least some of the audience, but what in the world can it be? So let's play it safe. We'll ask the six standard questions and crack the six standard jokes . . . and by then maybe the program will be over.

The trouble with science fiction (as we have said here in other connections) is that too many of its manifestations are under the control of people who don't know anything about it. As aficanados know, it won't fit a mold — especially not the Buck Rogers mold of dis-rays on Martian seabottoms.

They never seem to learn, do they? —THE EDITOR

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

To begin 1963 we offer New Year's Greetings to another star-class wordsmith who has somehow evaded *Galaxy's* shanghai squads up to this time. The man's name is Brian W. Aldiss; the story, a novella entitled *Comic Inferno*. In the same issue we have another novella, this one by Gordon R. Dickson — *Home from the Shore* — and at least one novelette, Cordwainer Smith's *Think Blue, Count Two*. Also shorts, features, Willy Ley — a full-sized portion of the best science-fiction reading we can find.

Care to look a little farther ahead? Damon Knight returns in the following issue with a *long* complete story called *The Visitor at the Zoo* — after that, the beginning of a two-part serial by Jack Vance (remember *The Dragon Masters?)* called *The Star King* — after that . . . well, wait and see!

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Here is a modern tale of an inner-directed sorcerer and an outer-directed sorcerer's apprentice . . . a tale of —

THE CREATURE FROM CLEVELAND DEPTHS

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrated by WOOD

"COME on, Gussy," Fay prodded quietly, "quit stalking around like a neurotic bear and suggest something for my invention team to work on. I enjoy visiting you and Daisy, but I can't stay aboveground all night."

"If being outside the shelters makes you nervous, don't come around any more," Gusterson told him, continuing to stalk. "Why doesn't your invention team think of something to invent? Why don't you? Hah!" In the "Hah!" lay triumphant condemnation of a whole way of life.

"We do," Fay responded imperturbably, "but a fresh viewpoint sometimes helps."

"I'll say it does! Fay, you burglar, I'll bet you've got twenty people like myself you milk for free ideas. First you irritate their bark and then you make the

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rounds every so often to draw off the latex or the maple gloop."

Fay smiled. "It ought to please you that society still has a use for you outre inner-directed types. It takes something to make a junior executive stay aboveground after dark, when the missiles are on the prowl."

"Society can't have much use for use or it'd pay us something," Gusterson sourly asserted, staring blankly at the tankless TV and kicking it lightly as he passed on.

"No, you're wrong about that, Gussy. Money's not the key goad with you inner-directeds. I got that straight from our Motivations chief."

"Did he tell you what we should use instead to pay the grocer? A deep inner sense of achievement, maybe? Fay, why should I do any free thinking for Micro Systems?"

"I'll tell you why, Gussy. Simply because you get a kick out of insulting us with sardonic ideas. If we take one of them seriously, you think we're degrading ourselves, and that pleases you even more. Like making someone laugh at a lousy pun."

GUSTERSON held still in his roaming and grinned. "That the reason, huh? I suppose my suggestions would have to be something in the line of ultra-subminiaturized computers, where one sinister fine-etched molecule does the work of three big bumbling brain cells?"

"Not necessarily. Micro Systems is branching out. Wheel as free as a rogue star. But I'll pass along to Promotion your one molecule-three brain cell sparkler. It's a slight exaggeration, but it's catchy."

"I'll have my kids watch your ads to see if you use it and then I'll sue the whole underworld." Gusterson frowned as he resumed his stalking. He stared puzzledly at the antique TV. "How about inventing a plutonium termite?" he said suddenly. "It would get rid of those stockpiles that are worrying you moles to death."

Fay grimaced noncommittally and cocked his head.

"Well, then, how about a beauty mask? How about that, hey? I don't mean one to repair a woman's complexion, but one she'd wear all the time that'd make her look like a 17-year-old sexpot. That'd end *her* worries."

"Hey, that's for me," Daisy called from the kitchen. "I'll make Gusterson suffer. I'll make him crawl around on his hands and knees begging my immature favors."

"No, you won't," Gusterson called back. "You having a face like that would scare the kids. Better cancel that one, Fay. Half

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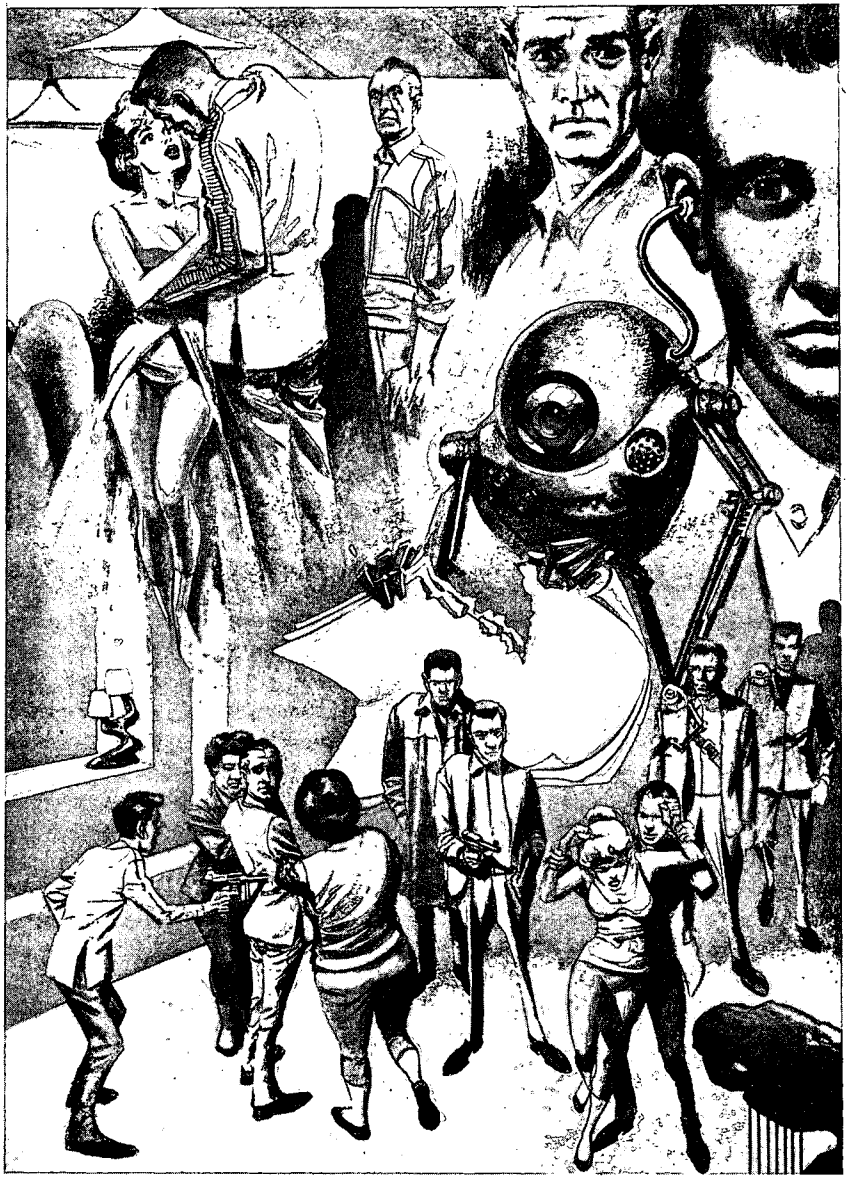

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the adult race looking like Vina Vidarsson is too awful a thought."

"Yah, you're just scared of making a million dollars," Daisy jeered.

"I sure am," Gusterson said solemnly, scanning the fuzzy floor from one murky glass wall to the other, hesitating at the TV. "How about something homey now, like a flock of little prickly cylinders that roll around the floor collecting lint and flub? They'd work by electricity, or at a pinch cats could bat 'em around. Every so often they'd be automatically herded together and the lint cleaned off the bristles."

"No good," Fay said. "There's no lint underground and cats are *verboten*. And the aboveground market doesn't amount to more moneywise than the state of Southern Illinois. Keep it grander, Gussy, and more impractical — you can't sell people merely useful ideas." From his hassock in the center of the room he looked uneasily around. "Say, did that violet tone in the glass come from the high Cleveland hydrogen bomb or is it just age and ultraviolet, like desert glass?"

"NO, somebody's grandfather liked it that color," Gusterson informed him with happy bitterness. "I like it too — the glass, I mean, not the tint. People who live in glass houses can see the stars — especially when there's a window-washing streak in their germ-plasm."

"Gussy, why don't you move underground?" Fay asked, his voice taking on a missionary note. "It's a lot easier living in one room, believe me. You don't have to tramp from room to room hunting things."

"I like the exercise," Gusterson said stoutly.

"But I bet Daisy'd prefer it underground. And your kids wouldn't have to explain why their father lives like a Red Indian. Not to mention the safety factor and insurance savings and a crypt church within easy slidewalk distance. Incidentally, we see the stars all the time, better than you do — by repeater."

"Stars by repeater," Gusterson murmured to the ceiling, pausing for God to comment. Then, "No, Fay, even if I could afford it — and stand it — I'm such a bad-luck Harry that just when I got us all safely stowed at the N minus 1 sublevel, the Soviets would discover an earthquake bomb that struck from below, and I'd have to follow everybody back to the treetops. *Hey! How about bubble homes in orbit around earth?* Micro Systems could subdivide the world's most spacious suburb

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and all you moles could go ellipsing. Space is as safe as there is: no air, no shock waves. Free fall's the ultimate in restfulness — great health benefits. Commute by rocket — or better yet stay home and do all your business by TV-telephone, or by waldo if it were that sort of thing. Even pet your girl by remote control — she in her bubble, you in yours, whizzing through vacuum. Oh, damn - damn - *damn* - *damn* - DAMN!"

He was glaring at the blank screen of the TV, his big hands clenching and unclenching.

"Don't let Fay give you apoplexy—he's not worth it," Daisy said, sticking her trim head in from the kitchen, while Fay inquired anxiously, "Gussy, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, you worm!" Gusterson roared, "Except that an hour ago I forgot to tune in on the only TV program I've wanted to hear this year — *Finnegans Wake* scored for English, Gaelic and brogue. Oh, damn-*damn*-DAMN!"

"Too bad," Fay said lightly. "I didn't know they were releasing it on flat TV too."

"WELL, they were! Some things are too damn big to keep completely underground. And I had to forget! I'm always doing it — I miss everything! Look here, you rat," he blatted suddenly at Fay, shaking his finger under the latter's chin, "I'll tell you what you can have that ignorant team of yours invent. They can fix me up a mechanical secretary that I can feed orders into and that'll remind me when the exact moment comes to listen to TV or phone somebody or mail in a story or write a letter or pick up a magazine or look at an eclipse or a new orbiting station or fetch the kids from school or buy Daisy a bunch of flowers or whatever it is. It's got to be something that's always with me, not something I have to go and consult or that I can get sick of and put down somewhere. And it's got to remind me forcibly enough so that I take notice and don't just shrug it aside, like I sometimes do even when Daisy reminds me of things. That's what your stupid team can invent for me! If they do a good job, I'll pay 'em as much as fifty dollars!"

"That doesn't sound like anything so very original to me," Fay commented coolly, leaning back from the wagging finger. "I think all senior executives have something of that sort. At least, their secretary keeps some kind of file . . ."

"I'm not looking for something with spiked falsies and nylons up to the neck," interjected Gusterson, whose ideas about secretaries were a trifle lurid. "I just want a

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mech reminder — that's all!"

"Well, I'll keep the idea in mind," Fay assured him, "along with the bubble homes and beauty masks. If we ever develop anything along those lines, I'll let you know. If it's a beauty mask, I'll bring Daisy a pilot model — to use to scare strange kids." He put his watch to his ear. "Good lord, I'm going to have to cut to make it underground before the main doors close. Just ten minutes to Second Curfew! 'By, Gus. 'By, Daze."

Two minutes later, living room lights out, they watched Fay's foreshortened antlike figure scurrying across the balding ill-lit park toward the nearest escalator.

Gusterson said, "Weird to think of that big bright space-poor glamor basement stretching around everywhere underneath. Did you remind Smitty to put a new bulb in the elevator?"

"The Smiths moved out this morning," Daisy said tonelessly. "They went underneath."

"Like cockroaches," Gusterson said. "Cockroaches leavin' a sinkin' apartment building. Next the ghosts'll be retreatin' to the shelters."

"Anyhow, from now on we're our own janitors," Daisy said.

He nodded. "Just leaves three families besides us loyal to this glass death trap. Not countin' ghosts." He sighed. Then, "You like to move below, Daisy?" he asked softly, putting his arm lightly across her shoulders. "Get a woozy eyeful of the bright lights and all for a change? Be a rat for a while? Maybe we're getting too old to be bats. I could scrounge me a company job and have a thinking closet all to myself and two secretaries with stainless steel breasts. Life'd be easier for you and a lot cleaner. And you'd sleep safer."

"That's true," she answered and paused. She ran her fingertip slowly across the murky glass, its violet tint barely perceptible against a cold dim light across the park. "But somehow," she said, snaking her arm around his waist, "I don't think I'd sleep happier — or one bit excited."

II

THREE weeks later Fay, dropping in again, handed to Daisy the larger of the two rather small packages he was carrying.

"It's a so-called beauty mask," he told her, "complete with wig, eyelashes, and wettable velvet lips. It even breathes — pinholed elastiskin with a static adherence-charge. But Micro Systems had nothing to do with it, thank God. Beauty Trix put it on the market ten days ago and it's already started a teen-age craze. Some

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boys are wearing them too, and the police are yipping at Trix for encouraging transvestism with psychic repercussions."

"Didn't I hear somewhere that Trix is a secret subsidiary of Micro?" Gusterson demanded, rearing up from his ancient electric typewriter. "No, you're not stopping me writing, Fay — it's the gut of evening. If I do any more I won't have any juice to start with tomorrow. I got another of my insanity thrillers moving. A real id-teaser. In this one not only all the characters are crazy but the robot psychiatrist too."

"The vending machines are jumping with insanity novels," Fay commented. "Odd they're so popular."

Gusterson chortled. "The only way you outer-directed moles will accept individuality any more even in a fictional character, without your superegos getting seasick, is for them to be crazy. Hey, Daisy! Lemme see that beauty mask!"

But his wife, backing out of the room, hugged the package to her bosom and solemnly shook her head.

"A hell of a thing," Gusterson complained, "not even to be able to see what my stolen ideas look like."

"I got a present for you too," Fay said. "Something you might think of as a royalty on all the inventions someone thought of a little ahead of you. Fifty dollars by your own evaluation." He held out the smaller package. "Your tickler."

"My *what?*" Gusterson demanded suspiciously.

"Your tickler. The mech reminder you wanted. It turns out that the file a secretary keeps to remind her boss to do certain things at certain times is called a tickler file. So we named this a tickler. Here."

Gusterson still didn't touch the package. "You mean you actually put your invention team to work on that nonsense?"

"Well, what do you think? Don't be scared of it. Here, I'll show you."

As he unwrapped the package, Fay said, "It hasn't been decided yet whether we'll manufacture it commercially. If we do, I'll put through a voucher for you — for 'development consultation' or something like that. Sorry no royalty's possible. Davidson's squad had started to work up the identical idea three years ago, but it got shelved. I found it on a snoop through the closets. There! Looks rich, doesn't it?"

ON THE scarred black tabletop was a dully gleaming silvery object about the size and shape of a cupped hand with fin-

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gers merging. A tiny pellet on a short near-invisible wire led off from it. On the back was a punctured area suggesting the face of a microphone; there was also a window with a date and time in hours and minutes showing through and next to that four little buttons in a row. The concave underside of the silvery "hand" was smooth except for a central area where what looked like two little rollers came through.

"It goes on your shoulder under your shirt," Fay explained, "and you tuck the pellet in your ear. We might work up bone conduction on a commercial model. Inside is an ultra-slow fine-wire recorder holding a spool that runs for a week. The clock lets you go to any place on the 7-day wire and record a message. The buttons give you variable speed in going there, so you don't waste too much time making a setting. There's a knack in fingering them efficiently, but it's easily acquired."

Fay picked up the tickler. "For instance, suppose there's a TV show you want to catch tomorrow night at twenty-two hundred." He touched the buttons. There was the faintest whirring. The clock face blurred briefly three times before showing the setting he'd mentioned. Then Fay spoke into the punctured area: "Turn on TV Channel Two, you big dummy!" He grinned over at Gusterson. "When you've got all your instructions to yourself loaded in, you synchronize with the present moment and let her roll. Fit it on your shoulder and forget it. Oh, yes, and it literally does tickle you every time it delivers an instruction. That's what the little rollers are for. Believe me, you can't ignore it. Come on, Gussy, take off your shirt and try it out. We'll feed in some instructions for the next ten minutes so you get the feel of how it works."

"I don't want to," Gusterson said. "Not right now. I want to sniff around it first. My God, it's small! Besides everything else it does, does it think?"

"Don't pretend to be an idiot, Gussy! You know very well that even with ultra-sub-micro nothing quite this small can possibly have enough elements to do any thinking."

Gusterson shrugged. "I don't know about that. I think bugs think."

FAY groaned faintly. "Bugs operate by instinct, Gussy," he said. "A patterned routine. They do not scan situations and consequences and then make decisions."

"I don't expect bugs to make decisions," Gusterson said. "For that matter I don't like people

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who go around alla time making decisions."

"Well, you can take it from me, Gussy, that this tickler is just a miniaturized wire recorder and clock . . . and a tickler. It doesn't do anything else."

"Not yet, maybe," Gusterson said darkly. "Not this model. Fay, I'm serious about bugs thinking. Or if they don't exactly think, they feel. They've got an interior drama. An inner glow. They're conscious. For that matter, Fay, I think all your really complex electronic computers are conscious too."

"Quit kidding, Gussy."

"Who's kidding?"

"You are. Computers simply aren't alive."

"What's alive? A word. I think computers are conscious, at least while they're operating. They've got that inner glow of awareness. They sort of . . . well . . . meditate."

"Gussy, computers haven't got any circuits for meditating. They're not programmed for mystical lucubrations. They've just got circuits for solving the problems they're on."

"Okay, you admit they've got problem-solving circuits — like a man has. I say if they've got the equipment for being conscious, they're conscious. What has wings, flies."

"Including stuffed owls and gilt eagles and dodoes — and wood-burning airplanes?"

"Maybe, under some circumstances. There *was* a wood-burning airplane. Fay," Gusterson continued, wagging his wrists for emphasis, "I really think computers are conscious. They just don't have any way of telling us that they are. Or maybe they don't have any *reason* to tell us, like the little Scotch boy who didn't say a word until he was fifteen and was supposed to be deaf and dumb."

"Why didn't he say a word?"

"Because he'd never had anything to say. Or take those Hindu fakirs, Fay, who sit still and don't say a word for thirty years or until their fingernails grow to the next village. If Hindu fakirs can do that, computers can!"

Looking as if he were masticating a lemon, Fay asked quietly, "Gussy, did you say you're working on an insanity novel?"

GUSTERSON frowned fiercely. "Now you're kidding," he accused Fay. "The dirty kind of kidding, too."

"I'm sorry," Fay said with light contrition. "Well, now you've sniffed at it, how about trying on Tickler?" He picked up the gleaming blunted crescent and jogged it temptingly under Gusterson's chin.

"Why should I?" Gusterson

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asked, stepping back. "Fay, I'm up to my ears writing a book. The last thing I want is something interrupting me to make me listen to a lot of junk and do a lot of useless things."

"But, dammit, Gussy! It was all your idea in the first place!" Fay blatted. Then, catching himself, he added, "I mean, you were one of the first people to think of this particular sort of instrument."

"Maybe so, but I've done some more thinking since then." Gusterson's voice grew a trifle solemn. "Inner-directed worthwhile thinkin'. Fay, when a man forgets to do something, it's because he really doesn't want to do it or because he's all roiled up down in his unconscious. He ought to take it as a danger signal and investigate the roiling, not hire himself a human or mech reminder."

"Bushwa," Fay retorted. "In that case you shouldn't write memorandums or even take notes."

"Maybe I shouldn't," Gusterson agreed lamely. "I'd have to think that over too."

"Ha!" Fay jeered. "No, I'll tell you what your trouble is, Gussy. You're simply scared of this contraption. You've loaded your skull with horror-story nonsense about machines sprouting minds and taking over the world — until you're even scared of a simple miniaturized and clocked recorder." He thrust it out.

"Maybe I am," Gusterson admitted, controlling a flinch. "Honestly, Fay, that thing's got a gleam in its eye as if it had ideas of its own. Nasty ideas."

"Gussy, you nut, it hasn't *got* an eye."

"Not now, no, but it's got the gleam — the eye may come. It's the Chesire cat in reverse. If you'd step over here and look at yourself holding it, you could see what I mean. But I don't think computers *sprout* minds, Fay. I just think they've *got* minds, because they've got the mind elements."

"Ho, ho!" Fay mocked. "Everything that has a material side has a mental side," he chanted. "Everything that's a body is also a spirit. Gussy, that dubious old metaphysical dualism went out centuries ago."

"Maybe so," Gusterson said, "but we still haven't anything but that dubious dualism to explain the human mind, have we? It's a jelly of nerve cells and it's a vision of the cosmos. If that isn't dualism, what is?"

"I give up. Gussy, are you going to try out this tickler?"

"No!"

"But dammit, Gussy, we made it just for you! — practically."

"Sorry, but I'm not coming near the thing."

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" 'Zen come near me," a husky voice intoned behind them. "Tonight I vant a man."

STANDING in the door was something slim in a short silver sheath. It had golden bangs and the haughtiest snub-nosed face in the world. It slunk toward them.

"My God, Vina Vidarsson!" Gusterson yelled.

"Daisy, that's terrific," Fay applauded, going up to her.

She bumped him aside with a swing of her hips, continuing to advance. "Not you, Ratty," she said throatily. "I vant a real man."

"Fay, I suggested Vina Vidarsson's face for the beauty mask," Gusterson said, walking around his wife and shaking a finger. "Don't tell me Trix just happened to think of that too."

"What else could they think of?" Fay laughed. "This season sex means VV and nobody else." An odd little grin flicked his lips, a tic traveled up his face and his body twitched slightly. "Say, folks, I'm going to have to be leaving. It's exactly fifteen minutes to Second Curfew. Last time I had to run and I got heartburn. When *are* you people going to move downstairs? I'll leave Tickler, Gussy. Play around with it and get used to it. 'By now."

"Hey, Fay," Gusterson called curiously, "have you developed absolute time sense?"

Fay grinned a big grin from the doorway — almost too big a grin for so small a man. "I didn't need to," he said softly, patting his right shoulder. "My tickler told me."

He closed the door behind him.

As side-by-side they watched him strut sedately across the murky chilly-looking park, Gusterson mused, "So the little devil had one of those nonsense-gadgets on all the time and I never noticed. Can you beat that?" Something drew across the violet-tinged stars a short bright line that quickly faded. "What's that?" Gusterson asked gloomily. "Next to last stage of missile-here?"

"Won't you settle for an old-fashioned shooting star?" Daisy asked softly. The (wettable) velvet lips of the mask made even her natural voice sound different. She reached a hand back of her neck to pull the thing off.

"Hey, don't do that," Gusterson protested in a hurt voice. "Not for a while anyway."

"Hokay!" she said harshly, turning on him. "Zen down on your knees, dog!"

III

IT WAS a fortnight and Gusterson was loping down the home stretch on his 40,000-word in-

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sanity novel before Fay dropped in again, this time promptly at high noon.

Normally Fay cringed his shoulders a trifle and was inclined to slither, but now he strode aggressively, his legs scissoring in a fast, low goosestep. He whipped off the sunglasses that all moles wore topside by day and began to pound Gusterson on the back while calling boisterously, "How are you, Gussy Old Boy, Old Boy?"

Daisy came in from the kitchen to see why Gusterson was choking. She was instantly grabbed and violently bussed to the accompaniment of, "Hiya, Gorgeous! Yum-yum! How about adlibbing that some weekend?"

She stared at Fay dazedly, rasping the back of her hand across her mouth, while Gusterson yelled, "Quit that! What's got into you, Fay? Have they transferred you out of R & D to Company Morale? Do they line up all the secretaries at roll call and make you give them an eight-hour energizing kiss?"

"Ha, wouldn't you like to know? Fay retorted. He grinned, twitched jumpingly, held still a moment, then hustled over to the far wall. "Look out there," he rapped, pointing through the violet glass at a gap between the two nearest old skyscraper apartments. "In thirty seconds you'll see them test the new needle bomb at the other end of Lake Erie. It's educational." He began to count off seconds, vigorously semaphoring his arm. ". . . . Two . . . three . . . Gussy, I've put through a voucher for two yards for you. Budgeting squawked, but I pressured 'em."

Daisy squealed, "Yards! — are those dollar thousands?" while Gusterson was asking, "Then you're marketing the tickler?"

"Yes. Yes," Fay replied to them in turn. ". . . Nine . . . ten . . ." Again he grinned and twitched. "Time for noon Comstaff," he announced staccato. "Pardon the hush box." He whipped a pancake phone from under his coat, clapped it over his face and spoke fiercely but inaudibly into it, continuing to semaphore. Suddenly he thrust the phone away. "Twenty-nine . . . thirty . . . Thar she blows!"

An incandescent streak shot up the sky from a little above the far horizon and a doubly dazzling point of light appeared just above the top of it, with the effect of God dotting an "i".

"Ha, that'll skewer espionage satellites like swatting flies!" Fay proclaimed as the portent faded. "Bracing! Gussy, where's your tickler? I've got a new spool for it that'll razzle-dazzle you."

"I'll bet," Gusterson said drily. "Daisy?"

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"You gave it to the kids and they got to fooling with it and broke it."

"No matter," Fay told them with a large sidewise sweep of his hand. "Better you wait for the new model. It's a six-way improvement."

"So I gather," Gusterson said, eyeing him speculatively. "Does it automatically inject you with cocaine? A fix every hour on the second?"

"Ha-ha, joke. Gussy, it achieves the same effect without using any dope at all. Listen: a tickler reminds you of your duties and opportunities — your chances for happiness and success! What's the obvious next step?"

"THROW it out the window. By the way, how do you do that when you're underground?"

"We have hi-speed garbage boosts. The obvious next step is you give the tickler a heart. It not only tells you, it warmly persuades you. It doesn't just say, 'Turn on the TV Channel Two, Joyce program,' it *brills* at you, 'Kid, Old Kid, race for the TV and flip that Two Switch! There's a great show coming through the pipes this second plus ten — you'll enjoy the hell out of yourself! Grab a ticket to ecstacy!' "

"My God," Gusterson gasped, "are those the kind of jolts it's giving you now?"

"Don't you get it, Gussy? You never load your tickler except when you're feeling buoyantly enthusiastic. You don't just tell yourself what to do hour by hour next week, you sell yourself on it. That way you not only make doubly sure you'll obey instructions but you constantly reinoculate yourself with your own enthusiasm."

"I can't stand myself when I'm that enthusiastic," Gusterson said. "I feel ashamed for hours afterwards."

"You're warped — all this lonely sky-life. What's more, Gussy, think how still more persuasive some of those instructions would be if they came to a man in his best girl's most bedroomy voice, or his doctor's or psycher's if it's that sort of thing — or Vina Vidarsson's! By the way, Daze, don't wear that beauty mask outside. It's a grand misdemeanor ever since ten thousand teen-agers rioted through Tunnel-Mart wearing them. And VV's sueing Trix."

"No chance of that," Daisy said. "Gusterson got excited and bit off the nose." She pinched her own delicately.

"I'd no more obey my enthusiastic self," Gusterson was brooding, "than I'd obey a Napoleon drunk on his own brandy or a hopped-up St. Francis. Reinoculated with my own enthusiasm?

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I'd die just like from snake-bite!"

"Warped, I said," Fay dogmatized, stamping around. "Gussy, having the instructions persuasive instead of neutral turned out to be only the opening wedge. The next step wasn't so obvious, but I saw it. Using subliminal verbal stimuli in his tickler, a man can be given constant supportive euphoric therapy 24 hours a day! And it makes use of all that empty wire. We've revived the ideas of a pioneer dynamic psycher named Dr. Coué. For instance, right now my tickler is saying to me — in tones too soft to reach my conscious mind, but do they stab into the unconscious! — 'Day by day in every way I'm getting sharper and sharper.' It alternates that with 'gutsier and gutsier' and . . . well, forget that. Coué mostly used 'better and better' but that seems too general. And every hundredth time it says them out loud and the tickler give me a brush — just a faint cootch — to make sure I'm keeping in touch."

"That third word-pair," Daisy wondered, feeling her mouth reminiscently. "Could I guess?"

GUSTERSON'S eyes had been growing wider and wider. "Fay," he said, "I could no more use my mind for anything if I knew all that was going on in my inner ear than if I were being brushed down with brooms by three witches. Look here," he said with loud authority, "you got to stop all this — it's crazy. Fay, if Micro'll junk the tickler, I'll think you up something else to invent — something real good."

"Your inventing days are over," Fay brilled gleefully. "I mean, you'll never equal your masterpiece."

"How about," Gusterson bellowed, "an anti-individual guided missile? The physicists have got small-scale antigravity good enough to float and fly something the size of a hand grenade. I can smell that even though it's a back-of-the-safe military secret. Well, how about keying such a missile to a man's finger-prints — or brainwaves, maybe, or his unique smell! — so it can spot and follow him around the target in on him, without harming anyone else? Long-distance assassination — and the stinkingest gets it! Or you could simply load it with some disgusting goo and key it to teen-agers as a group — that'd take care of them. Fay, doesn't it give you a rich warm kick to think of my midget missiles buzzing around in your tunnels, seeking out evil-doers, like a swarm of angry wasps or angelic bumblebees?"

"You're not luring me down any side trails," Fay said laughingly. He grinned and twitched,

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then hurried toward the opposite wall, motioning them to follow. Outside, about a hundred yards beyond the purple glass, rose another ancient glass-walled apartment skyscraper. Beyond, Lake Erie rippled glintingly.

"Another bomb-test?" Gusterson asked.

Fay pointed at the building. "Tomorrow," he announced, "a modern factory, devoted solely to the manufacture of ticklers, will be erected on that site."

"You mean one of those windowless phallic eyesores?" Gusterson demanded. "Fay, you people aren't even consistent. You've got all your homes underground. Why not your factories?"

"Sh! Not enough room. And night missiles are scarier."

"I know that building's been empty for a year," Daisy said uneasily, "but how — ?"

"Sh! Watch! *Now!*"

The looming building seemed to blur or fuzz for a moment. Then it was as if the lake's bright ripples had invaded the old glass a hundred yards away. Wavelets chased themselves up and down the gleaming walls, became higher, higher . . . and then suddenly the glass cracked all over to tiny fragments and fell away, to be followed quickly by fragmented concrete and plastic and plastic piping, until all that was left was the nude steel framework, vibrating so rapidly as to be almost invisible against the gleaming lake.

DAISY COVERED her ears, but there was no explosion, only a long-drawn-out low crash as the fragments hit twenty floors below and dust whooshed out sideways.

"Spectacular!" Fay summed up. "Knew you'd enjoy it. That little trick was first conceived by the great Tesla during his last fruity years. Research discovered it in his biog — we just made the dream come true. A tiny resonance device you could carry in your belt-bag attunes itself to the natural harmonic of a structure and then increases amplitude by tiny pushes exactly in time. Just like soldiers marching in step can break down a bridge, only this is as if it were being done by one marching ant." He pointed at the naked framework appearing out of its own blur and said, "We'll be able to hang the factory on that. If not, we'll whip a megacurrent through it and vaporize it. No question the micro-resonator is the neatest sweetest wrecking device going. You can expect a lot more of this sort of efficiency now that mankind has the tickler to enable him to use his full potential. What's the matter, folks?"

Daisy was staring around the violet-walled room with dumb

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mistrust. Her hands were trembling.

"You don't have to worry," Fay assured her with an understanding laugh. "This building's safe for a month more at least." Suddenly he grimaced and leaped a foot in the air. He raised a clawed hand to scratch his shoulder but managed to check the movement. "Got to beat it, folks," he announced tersely. "My tickler gave me the grand cootch."

"Don't go yet," Gusterson called, rousing himself with a shudder which he immediately explained: "I just had the illusion that if I shook myself all my flesh and guts would fall off my shimmying skeleton. Brr! Fay, before you and Micro go off half cocked, I want you to know there's one insuperable objection to the tickler as a mass-market item. The average man or woman won't go to the considerable time and trouble it must take to load a tickler. He simply hasn't got the compulsive orderliness and willingness to plan that it requires."

"We thought of that weeks ago," Fay rapped, his hand on the door. "Every tickler spool that goes to market is patterned like wallpaper with one of five designs of suitable subliminal supportive euphoric material. 'Ittier and ittier,' 'viriler and viriler' — you know. The buyer is robot-interviewed for an hour, his personalized daily routine laid out and thereafter templated on his weekly spool. He's strongly urged next to take his tickler to his doctor and psycher for further instruction-imposition. We've been working with the medical profession from the start. They love the tickler because it'll remind people to take their medicine on the dot . . . and rest and eat and go to sleep just when and how doc says. This is a big operation, Gussy—a biiiiiiig operation! 'By!"

Daisy hurried to the wall to watch him cross the park. Deep down she was a wee bit worried that he might linger to attach a micro-resonator to *this* building and she wanted to time him. But Gusterson settled down to his typewriter and began to bat away.

"I want to have another novel started," he explained to her, "before the ant marches across this building in about four and a half weeks . . . or a million sharp little gutsy guys come swarming out of the ground and heave it into Lake Erie."

IV

EARLY NEXT morning windowless walls began to crawl up the stripped skyscraper between them and the lake. Daisy

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pulled the black-out curtains on that side. For a day or two longer their thoughts and conversations were haunted by Gusterson's vague sardonic visions of a horde of tickler-energized moles pouring up out of the tunnels to tear down the remaining trees, tank the atmosphere and perhaps somehow dismantle the stars — at least on this side of the world — but then they both settled back into their customary easy-going routines. Gusterson typed. Daisy made her daily shopping trip to a little topside daytime store and started painting a mural on the floor of the empty apartment next theirs but one.

"We ought to lasso some neighbors," she suggested once. "I need somebody to hold my brushes and admire. How about you making a trip below at the cocktail hours, Gusterson, and picking up a couple of girls for a starter? Flash the old viriler charm, cootch them up a bit, emphasize the delights of high living, but make sure they're compatible roommates. You could pick up that two-yard check from Micro at the same time."

"You're an immoral money-ravenous wench," Gusterson said absently, trying to dream of an insanity beyond insanity that would make his next novel a real id-rousing best-vender.

"If that's your vision of me, you shouldn't have chewed up the VV mask."

"I'd really prefer you with green stripes," he told her. "But stripes, spots, or sun-bathing, you're better than those cocktail moles."

Actually both of them acutely disliked going below. They much preferred to perch in their eyrie and watch the people of Cleveland Depths, as they privately called the local sub-suburb, rush up out of the shelters at dawn to work in the concrete fields and windowless factories, make their daytime jet trips and freeway jaunts, do their noon-hour and coffee-break guerrilla practice; and then go scurrying back at twilight to the atomic-proof, brightly lit, vastly exciting, claustrophobic caves.

Fay and his projects began once more to seem dreamlike, though Gusterson did run across a cryptic advertisement for ticklers in *The Manchester Guardian*, which he got daily by facsimile. Their three children reported similar ads, of no interest to young fry, on the TV and one afternoon they came home with the startling news that the monitors at their subsurface school had been issued ticklers. On sharp interrogation by Gusterson, however, it appeared that these last were not ticklers but merely two-way radios linked to

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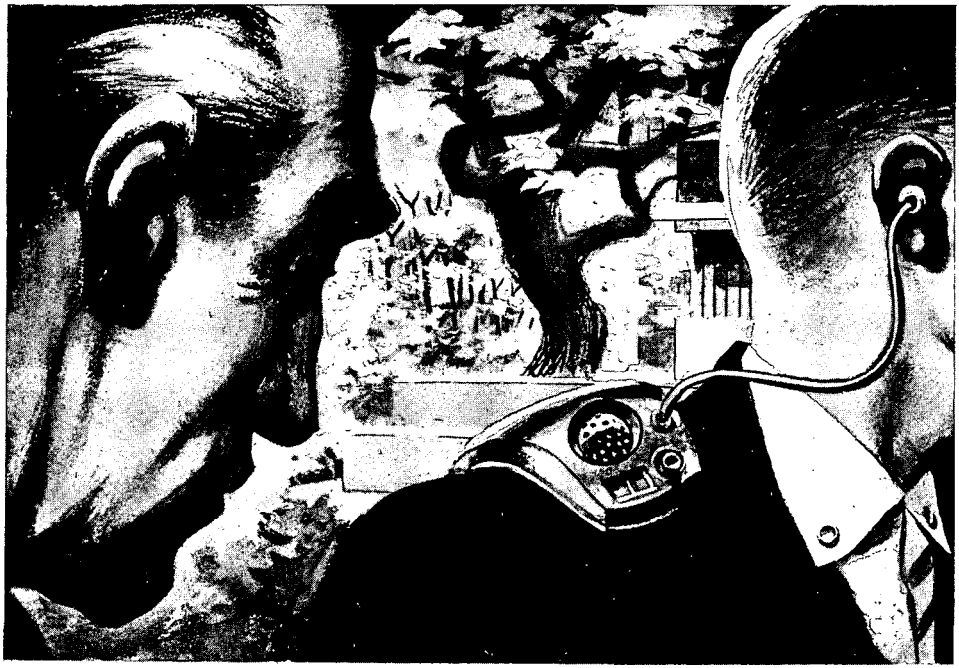

the school police station transmitter.

"Which is bad enough," Gusterson commented later to Daisy. "But it'd be even dirtier to think of those clock-watching superegos being strapped to kids' shoulders. Can you imagine Huck Finn with a tickler, tellin' him when to tie up the raft to a towhead and when to take a swim?"

"I bet Fay could," Daisy countered. "When's he going to bring you that check, anyhow? Iago wants a jetcycle and I promised Imogene a Vina Kit and then Claudius'll have to have something."

Gusterson scowled thoughtfully. "You know, Daze," he said, "I got a feeling Fay's in the hospital, all narcotized up and being fed intravenously. The way he was jumping around last time, that tickler was going to cootch him to pieces in a week."

AS IF TO refute this intuition, Fay turned up that very evening. The lights were dim. Something had gone wrong with the building's old transformer and, pending repairs, the two remaining occupied apartments were making do with batteries, which turned bright globes to mysterious amber candles and made Gusterson's ancient typewriter operate sluggishly.

Fay's manner was subdued or

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at least closely controlled and for a moment Gusterson thought he'd shed his tickler. Then the little man came out of the shadows and Gusterson saw the large bulge on his right shoulder.

"Yes, we had to up it a bit sizewise," Fay explained in clipped tones. "Additional superfeatures. While brilliantly successful on the whole, the subliminal euphorics were a shade too effective. Several hundred users went hoppity manic. We gentled the cootch and qualified the subliminals — you know, 'Day by day in every way I'm getting sharper *and more serene*' — but a stabilizing influence was still needed, so after a top-level conference we decided to combine Tickler with Moodmaster."

"My God," Gusterson interjected, "do they have a machine now that does that?"

"Of course. They've been using them on ex-mental patients for years."

"I just don't keep up with progress," Gusterson said, shaking his head bleakly. "I'm falling behind on all fronts."

"You ought to have your tickler remind you to read Science Service releases," Fay told him. "Or simply instruct it to scan the releases and — no, that's still in research." He looked at Gusterson's shoulder and his eyes widened. "You're not wearing the

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new-model tickler I sent you," he said accusingly.

"I never got it," Gusterson assured him. "Postmen deliver top-side mail and parcels by throwing them on the high-speed garbage boosts and hoping a tornado will blow them to the right addresses." Then he added helpfully, "Maybe the Russians stole it while it was riding the whirlwinds."

"That's not a suitable topic for jesting," Fay frowned. "We're hoping that Tickler will mobilize the full potential of the Free World for the first time in history. Gusterson, you are going to have to wear a ticky-tick. It's becoming impossible for a man to get through modern life without one."

"Maybe I will," Gusterson said appeasingly, "but right now tell me about Moodmaster. I want to put it in my new insanity novel."

Fay shook his head. "Your readers will just think you're behind the times. If you use it, underplay it. But anyhow, Moodmaster is a simple physiotherapy engine that monitors bloodstream chemicals and body electricity. It ties directly into the bloodstream, keeping blood, sugar, et cetera, at optimum levels and injecting euphrin or depressin as necessary — and occasionally a touch of extra adrenaline, as during work emergencies."

"Is it painful?" Daisy called from the bedroom.

"Excruciating," Gusterson called back. "Excuse it, please," he grinned at Fay. "Hey, didn't I suggest cocaine injections last time I saw you?"

"So you did," Fay agreed flatly. "Oh by the way, Gussy, here's that check for a yard I promised you. Micro doesn't muzzle the ox."

"Hooray!" Daisy cheered faintly.

"I THOUGHT you said it was going to be for two." Gusterson complained.

"Budgeting always forces a last-minute compromise," Fay shrugged. "You have to learn to accept those things."

"I love accepting money and I'm glad any time for three feet," Daisy called agreeably. "Six feet might make me wonder if I weren't an insect, but getting a yard just makes me feel like a gangster's moll."

"Want to come out and gloat over the yard paper, Toots, and stuff it in your diamond-embroidered net stocking top?" Gusterson called back.

"No, I'm doing something to that portion of me just now. But hang onto the yard, Gusterson."

"Aye-aye, Cap'n," he assured her. Then, turning back to Fay, "So you've taken the Dr. Coué

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repeating out of the tickler?"

"Oh, no. Just balanced it off with depressin. The subliminals are still a prime sales-point. All the tickler features are cumulative, Gussy. You're still underestimating the scope of the device."

"I guess I am. What's this 'work-emergencies' business? If you're using the tickler to inject drugs into workers to keep them going, that's really just my cocaine suggestion modernized and I'm putting in for another thou. Hundreds of years ago the South American Indians chewed coca leaves to kill fatigue sensations."

"That so? Interesting — and it proves priority for the Indians, doesn't it? I'll make a try for you, Gussy, but don't expect anything." He cleared his throat, his eyes grew distant and, turning his head a little to the right, he enunciated sharply, "Pooh-Bah. Time: Inst oh five. One oh five seven. Oh oh. Record: Gussy coca thou budget. Cut." He explained, "We got a voice-cued setter now on the deluxe models. You can record a memo to yourself without taking off your shirt. Incidentally, I use the ends of the hours for trifle-memos. I've already used up the fifty-nines and eights for tomorrow and started on the fifty-sevens."

"I understood most of your memo," Gusterson told him gruffly. "The last 'Oh oh' was for seconds, wasn't it? Now I call that crude — why not microseconds too? But how do you remember where you've made a memo so you don't rerecord over it? After all, you're rerecording over the wallpaper all the time."

"Tickler beeps and then hunts for the nearest information-free space."

"I see. And what's the Pooh-Bah for?"

Fay smiled. "Cut. My password for activating the setter, so it won't respond to chance numerals it overhears."

"But why Pooh-Bah?"

Fay grinned. "Cut. And you a writer. It's a literary reference, Gussy. Pooh-Bah (cut!) was Lord High Everything Else in *The Mikado*. He had a little list and nothing on it would ever be missed."

"OH, YEAH," Gusterson remembered, glowering. "As I recall it, all that went on that list was the names of people who were slated to have their heads chopped off by Ko-Ko. Better watch your step, Shorty. It may be a back-handed omen. Maybe all those workers you're puttin' ticklers on to pump them full of adrenaline so they'll overwork without noticin' it will revolt and come out some day choppin' for your head."

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"Spare me the Marxist mythology," Fay protested. "Gussy, you've got a completely wrong slant on Tickler. It's true that most of our mass sales so far, bar government and army, have been to large companies purchasing for their employees — "

"Ah-ha!"

" — but that's because there's nothing like a tickler for teaching a new man his job. It tells him from instant to instant what he must do — while he's already on the job and without disturbing other workers. Magnetizing a wire with a job pattern is the easiest thing going. And you'd be astonished what the subliminals do for employee morale. It's this way, Gussy: most people are too improvident and unimaginative to see in advance the advantages of ticklers. They buy one because the company strongly suggests it and payment is on easy installments withheld from salary. They find a tickler makes the work day go easier. The little fellow perched on your shoulder is a friend exuding comfort and good advice. The first thing he's set to say is 'Take it easy, pal.'

"Within a week they're wearing their tickler 24 hours a day —and buying a tickler for the wife, so she'll remember to comb her hair and smile real pretty and cook favorite dishes."

"I get it, Fay," Gusterson cut in. "The tickler is the newest fad for increasing worker efficiency. Once, I read somewheres, it was salt tablets. They had salt-tablet dispensers everywhere, even in air-conditioned offices where there wasn't a moist armpit twice a year and the gals sweat only champagne. A decade later people wondered what all those dusty white pills were for. Sometimes they were mistook for tranquilizers. It'll be the same way with ticklers. Somebody'll open a musty closet and see jumbled heaps of these gripping-hand silvery gadgets gathering dust curls and —"

"They will not!" Fay protested vehemently. "Ticklers are not a fad — they're history-changers, they're Free-World revolutionary! Why, before Micro Systems put a single one on the market, we'd made it a rule that every Micro employee had to wear one! If that's not having supreme confidence in a product — "

"Every employee except the top executives, of course," Gusterson interrupted jeeringly. "And that's not demoting you, Fay. As the R & D chief most closely involved, you'd naturally have to show special enthusiasm."

"But you're wrong there, Gussy," Fay crowed. "Man for man, our top executives have been more enthusiastic about their personal ticklers than any other

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class of worker in the whole outfit."

Gusterson slumped and shook his head. "If that's the case," he said darkly, "maybe mankind deserves the tickler."

"I'LL SAY IT does!" Fay agreed loudly without thinking. Then, "Oh, can the carping, Gussy. Tickler's a great invention. Don't deprecate it just because you had something to do with its genesis. You're going to have to get in the swim and wear one."

"Maybe I'd rather drown horribly."

"Can the gloom-talk too! Gussy, I said it before and I say it again, you're just scared of this new thing. Why, you've even got the drapes pulled so you won't have to look at the tickler factory."

"Yes, I am scared," Gusterson said. "Really sca . . . AWP!"

Fay whirled around. Daisy was standing in the bedroom doorway, wearing the short silver sheath. This time there was no mask, but her bobbed hair was glitteringly silvered, while her legs, arms, hands, neck, face — every bit of her exposed skin — was painted with beautifully even vertical green stripes.

"I did it as a surprise for Gusterson," she explained to Fay. "He says he likes me this way. The green glop's supposed to be smudgeproof."

Gusterson did not comment. His face had a rapt expression. "I'll tell you why your tickler's so popular, Fay," he said softly. "It's not because it backstops the memory or because it boosts the ego with subliminals. It's because it takes the hook out of a guy, it takes over the job of withstanding the pressure of living. See, Fay, here are all these little guys in this subterranean rat race with atomic-death squares and chromium-plated reward squares and enough money if you pass Go almost to get to Go again — and a million million rules of the game to keep in mind. Well, here's this one little guy and every morning he wakes up there's all these things he's got to keep in mind to do or he'll lose his turn three times in a row and maybe a terrible black rook in iron armor'll loom up and bang him off the chessboard. But now, look, now he's got his tickler and he tells his sweet silver tickler all these things and the tickler's got to remember them. Of course he'll have to do them eventually but meanwhile the pressure's off him, the hook's out of his short hairs. He's shifted the responsibility . . ."

"Well, what's so bad about that?" Fay broke in loudly. "What's wrong with taking the

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pressure off little guys? Why shouldn't Tickler be a super-ego surrogate? Micro's Motivations chief noticed that positive feature straight off and scored it three pluses. Besides, it's nothing but a gaudy way of saying that Tickler backstops the memory. Seriously, Gussy, what's so bad about it?"

"I don't know," Gusterson said slowly, his eyes still far away. "I just know it feels bad to me." He crinkled his big forehead. "Well for one thing," he said, "it means that a man's taking orders from something else. He's got a kind of master. He's sinking back into a slave psychology."

"He's only taking orders from himself," Fay countered disgustedly. "Tickler's just a mech reminder, a notebook, in essence no more than the back of an old envelope. It's no master."

"Are you absolutely sure of that?" Gusterson asked quietly.

"Why, Gussy, you big oaf —" Fay began heatedly. Suddenly his features quirked and he twitched. " 'Scuse me, folks," he said rapidly, heading for the door, "but my tickler told me I gotta go."

"Hey Fay, don't you mean you told your tickler to tell you when it was time to go?" Gusterson called after him.

Fay looked back in the doorway. He wet his lips, his eyes moved from side to side. "I'm not quite sure," he said in an odd strained voice and darted out.

GUSTERSON stared for some seconds at the pattern of emptiness Fay had left. Then he shivered. Then he shrugged. "I must be slipping," he muttered. "I never even suggested something for him to invent." Then he looked around at Daisy, who was still standing poker-faced in her doorway.

"Hey, you look like something out of the Arabian Nights," he told her. "Are you supposed to be anything special? How far do those stripes go, anyway?"

"You could probably find out," she told him coolly. "All you have to do is kill me a dragon or two first."

He studied her. "My God," he said reverently, "I really have all the fun in life. What do I do to deserve this?"

"You've got a big gun," she told him, "and you go out in the world with it and hold up big companies and take yards and yards of money away from them in rolls like ribbon and bring it all home to me."

"Don't say that about the gun again," he said. "Don't whisper it, don't even think it. I've got one, dammit — thirty-eight caliber, yet — and I don't want some psionic monitor with two-way

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clairaudience they haven't told me about catching the whisper and coming to take the gun away from us. It's one of the few individuality symbols we've got left."

Suddenly Daisy whirled away from the door, spun three times so that her silvered hair stood out like a metal coolie hat, and sank to a curtsey in the middle of the room.

"I've just thought of what I am," she announced, fluttering her eyelashes at him. "I'm a sweet silver tickler with green stripes."

V

NEXT day Daisy cashed the Micro check for ten hundred silver smackers, which she hid in a broken radionic coffee urn. Gusterson sold his insanity novel and started a new one about a mad medic with a hiccupy hysterical chuckle, who gimmicked Moodmasters to turn mental patients into nymphomaniacs, mass murderers and compulsive saints. But this time he couldn't get Fay out of his mind, or the last chilling words the nervous little man had spoken.

For that matter, he couldn't blank the underground out of his mind as effectively as usually. He had the feeling that a new kind of mole was loose in the burrows and that the ground at the foot of their skyscraper might start humping up any minute.

Toward the end of one afternoon he tucked a half dozen newly typed sheets in his pocket, shrouded his typer, went to the hatrack and took down his prize: a miner's hard-top cap with electric headlamp.

"Goin' below, Cap'n," he shouted toward the kitchen.

"Be back for second dog watch," Daisy replied. "Remember what I told you about lassoing me some art-conscious girl neighbors."

"Only if I meet a piebald one with a taste for Scotch — or maybe a pearl gray biped jaguar with violet spots," Gusterson told her, clapping on the cap with a We-Who Are-About-To-Die gesture.

Halfway across the park to the escalator bunker Gusterson's heart began to tick. He resolutely switched on his headlamp.

As he'd known it would, the hatch robot whirred an extra and higher-pitched ten seconds when it came to his topside address, but it ultimately dilated the hatch for him, first handing him a claim check for his ID card.

Gusterson's heart was ticking like a sledgehammer by now. He hopped clumsily onto the escalator, clutched the moving guard rail to either side, then shut his eyes as the steps went over the edge and became what felt like

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vertical. An instant later he forced his eyes open, unclipped a hand from the rail and touched the second switch beside his headlamp, which instantly began to blink whitely, as if he were a civilian plane flying into a nest of military jobs.

With a further effort he kept his eyes open and flinchingly surveyed the scene around him. After zigging through a bomb-proof half-furlong of roof, he was dropping into a large twilit cave. The blue-black ceiling twinkled with stars. The walls were pierced at floor level by a dozen archways with busy niche stores and glowing advertisements crowded between them. From the archways some three dozen slidewalks curved out, tangenting off each other in a bewildering multiple cloverleaf. The slidewalks were packed with people, traveling motionless like purposeful statues or pivoting with practiced grace from one slidewalk to another, like a thousand toreros doing veronicas.

THE slidewalks were moving faster than he recalled from his last venture underground and at the same time the whole pedestrian concourse was quieter than he remembered. It was as if the five thousand or so moles in view were all listening — for what? But there was something else that had changed about them — a change that he couldn't for a moment define, or unconsciously didn't want to. Clothing style? No . . . My God, they weren't all wearing identical monster masks? No . . . Hair color? . . . Well . . .

He was studying them so intently that he forgot his escalator was landing. He came off it with a heel-jarring stumble and bumped into a knot of four men on the tiny triangular hold-still. These four at least sported a new style-wrinkle: ribbed gray shoulder-capes that made them look as if their heads were poking up out of the center of bulgy umbrellas or giant mushrooms.

One of them grabbed hold of Gusterson and saved him from staggering onto a slidewalk that might have carried him to Toledo.

"Gussy, you dog, you must have esped I wanted to see you," Fay cried, patting him on the elbows. "Meet Davidson and Kester and Hazen, colleagues of mine. We're all Micro-men." Fay's companions were staring strangely at Gusterson's blinking headlamp. Fay explained rapidly, "Mr. Gusterson is an insanity novelist. You know, I-D."

"Inner-directed spells *id*," Gusterson said absently, still staring at the interweaving crowd beyond them, trying to figure out what made them different from

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last trip. "Creativity fuel. Cranky. Explodes through the parietal fissure if you look at it cross-eyed."

"Ha-ha," Fay laughed. "Well, boys, I've found my man. How's the new novel perking, Gussy?"

"Got my climax, I think," Gusterson mumbled, still peering puzzledly around Fay at the slidestanders. "Moodmaster's going to come alive. Ever occur to you that 'mood' is 'doom' spelled backwards? And then . . ." He let his voice trail off as he realized that Kester and Davidson and Hazen had made their farewells and were sliding into the distance. He reminded himself wryly that nobody ever wants to hear an author talk — he's much too good a listener to be wasted that way. Let's see, was it that everybody in the crowd had the same facial expression . . .? Or showed symptoms of the same disease . . .?

"I was coming to visit you, but now you can pay me a call," Fay was saying. "There are two matters I want to —"

Gusterson stiffened. *"My God, they're all hunchbacked!"* he yelled.

"Shh! Of course they are," Fay whispered reprovingly. "They're all wearing their ticklers. But you don't need to be insulting about it."

"I'm gettin' out o' here." Gusterson turned to flee as if from five thousand Richard the Thirds.

"Oh no you're not," Fay amended, drawing him back with one hand. Somehow, underground, the little man seemed to carry more weight. "You're having cocktails in my thinking box. Besides, climbing a down escaladder will give you a heart attack."

IN HIS home habitat Gusterson was about as easy to handle as a rogue rhinoceros, but away from it — and especially if underground — he became more like a pliable elephant. All his bones dropped out through his feet, as he described it to Daisy. So now he submitted miserably as Fay surveyed him up and down, switched off his blinking headlamp ("That coalminer caper is corny, Gussy.") and then— surprisingly — rapidly stuffed his belt-bag under the right shoulder of Gusterson's coat and buttoned the latter to hold it in place.

"So you won't stand out," he explained. Another swift survey. "You'll do. Come on, Gussy. I got lots to brief you on." Three rapid paces and then Gusterson's feet would have gone out from under him except that Fay gave him a mighty shove. The small man sprang onto the slidewalk after him and then they were skimming effortlessly side by side.

Gusterson felt frightened and

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twice as hunchbacked as the slidestanders around him — morally as well as physically.

Nevertheless he countered bravely, "I got things to brief *you* on. I got six pages of cautions on ti —"

"Shh!" Fay stopped him. "Let's use my hushbox."

He drew out his pancake phone and stretched it so that it covered both their lower faces, like a double yashmak. Gusterson, his neck pushing into the ribbed bulge of the shoulder cape so he could be cheek to cheek with Fay, felt horribly conspicuous, but then he noticed that none of the slidestanders were paying them the least attention. The reason for their abstraction occurred to him. They were listening to their ticklers! He shuddered.

"I got six pages of caution on ticklers," he repeated into the hot, moist quiet of the pancake phone. "I typed 'em so I wouldn't forget 'em in the heat of polemicking. I want you to read every word. Fay, I've had it on my mind ever since I started wondering whether it was you or your tickler made you duck out of our place last time you were there. I want you to—"

"Ha-ha! All in good time." In the pancake phone Fay's laugh was brassy. "But I'm glad you've decided to lend a hand, Gussy. This thing is moving faaaasst. Nationwise, adult underground ticklerization is 90 per cent complete."

"I don't believe that," Gusterson protested while glaring at the hunchbacks around them. The slidewalk was gliding down a low glow-ceiling tunnel lined with doors and advertisements. Rapt-eyed people were pirouetting on and off. "A thing just can't develop that fast, Fay. It's against nature."

"Ha, but we're not in nature, we're in culture. The progress of an industrial scientific culture is geometric. It goes n-times as many jumps as it takes. More than geometric — exponential. Confidentially, Micro's Math chief tells me we're currently on a fourth-power progress curve trending into a fifth."

"You mean we're goin' so fast we got to watch out we don't bump ourselves in the rear when we come around again?" Gusterson asked, scanning the tunnel ahead for curves. "Or just shoot straight up to infinity?"

"Exactly! Of course most of the last power and a half is due to Tickler itself. Gussy, the tickler's already eliminated absenteeism, alcoholism and aboulia in numerous urban areas — and that's just one letter of the alphabet! If Tickler doesn't turn us into a nation of photo-memory constant-

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creative-flow geniuses in six months, I'll come live topside."

"YOU mean because a lot of people are standing around glassy-eyed listening to something mumbling in their ear that it's a good thing?"

"Gussy, you don't know progress when you see it. Tickler is the greatest invention since language. Bar none, it's the greatest instrument ever devised for integrating a man into all phases of his environment. Under the present routine a newly purchased tickler first goes to government and civilian defense for primary patterning, then to the purchaser's employer, then to his doctor-psycher, then to his local bunker captain, then to *him. Everything* that's needful for a man's welfare gets on the spools. Efficiency cubed! Incidentally, Russia's got the tickler now. Our dip-satellites have photographed it. It's like ours except the Commies wear it on the left shoulder . . . but they're two weeks behind us developmentwise and they'll never close the gap!"

Gusterson reared up out of the pancake phone to take a deep breath. A sulky-lipped sylph-figured girl two feet from him twitched — medium cootch, he judged — then fumbled in her belt-bag for a pill and popped it in her mouth.

"Hell, the tickler's not even efficient yet about little things," Gusterson blatted, diving back into the privacy-yashmak he was sharing with Fay. "Whyn't that girl's doctor have the Mood-master component of her tickler inject her with medicine?"

"Her doctor probably wants her to have the discipline of pill-taking — or the exercise," Fay answered glibly. "Look sharp now. Here's where we fork. I'm taking you through Micro's postern."

A ribbon of slidewalk split itself from the main band and angled off into a short alley. Gusterson hardly felt the constant-speed juncture as they crossed it. Then the secondary ribbon speeded up, carrying them at about 30 feet a second toward the blank concrete wall in which the alley ended. Gusterson prepared to jump, but Fay grabbed him with one hand and with the other held up toward the wall a badge and a button. When they were about ten feet away the wall whipped aside, then whipped shut behind them so fast that Gusterson wondered momentarily if he still had his heels and the seat of his pants.

Fay, tucking away his badge and pancake phone, dropped the button in Gusterson's vest pocket. "Use it when you leave," he said casually. "That is, if you leave."

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Gusterson, who was trying to read the Do and Don't posters papering the walls they were passing, started to probe that last sinister supposition, but just then the ribbon slowed, a swinging door opened and closed behind them and they found themselves in a luxuriously furnished thinking box measuring at least eight feet by five.

"HEY, this is something," Gusterson said appreciatively to show he wasn't an utter yokel. Then, drawing on research he'd done for period novels, "Why, it's as big as a Pullman car compartment, or a first mate's cabin in the War of 1812. You really must rate."

Fay nodded, smiled wanly and sat down with a sigh on a compact overstuffed swivel chair. He let his arms dangle and his head sink into his puffed shoulder cape. Gusterson stared at him. It was the first time he could ever recall the little man showing fatigue.

"Tickler currently does have one serious drawback," Fay volunteered. "It weighs 28 pounds. You feel it when you've been on your feet a couple of hours. No question we're going to give the next model that antigravity feature you mentioned for pursuit grenades. We'd have had it in this model except there were so many other things to be incorporated." He sighed again. "Why, the scanning and and decision-making elements alone tripled the mass."

"Hey," Gusterson protested, thinking especially of the sulky-lipped girl, "do you mean to tell me all those other people were toting two stone?"

Fay shook his head heavily. "They were all wearing Mark 3 or 4. I'm wearing Mark 6," he said, as one might say, "I'm carrying the genuine Cross, not one of the balsa ones."

But then his face brightened a little and he went on. "Of course the new improved features make it more than worth it . . . and you hardly feel it at all at night when you're lying down . . . and if you remember to talcum under it twice a day, no sores develop . . . at least not very big ones . . ."

Backing away involuntarily, Gusterson felt something prod his right shoulderblade. Ripping open his coat, he convulsively plunged his hand under it and tore out Fay's belt-bag . . . and then set it down very gently on the top of a shallow cabinet and relaxed with the sigh of one who has escaped a great, if symbolic, danger. Then he remembered something Fay had mentioned. He straightened again.

"Hey, you said it's got scanning and decision-making elements. That means your tickler thinks,

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even by your fancy standards. And if it thinks, it's conscious."

"Gussy," Fay said wearily, frowning, "all sorts of things nowadays have S&DM elements. Mail sorters, missiles, robot medics, high-style mannequins, just to name some of the Ms. They 'think,' to use that archiac word, but it's neither here nor there. And they're certainly not conscious."

"Your tickler thinks," Gusterson repeated stubbornly, "just like I warned you it would. It sits on your shoulder, ridin' you like you was a pony or a starved St. Bernard, and now it thinks."

"Suppose it does?" Fay yawned. "What of it?" He gave a rapid sinuous one-sided shrug that made it look for a moment as if his left arm had three elbows. It stuck in Gusterson's mind, for he had never seen Fay use such a gesture and he wondered where he'd picked it up. Maybe imitating a double-jointed Micro Finance chief? Fay yawned again and said, "Please, Gussy, don't disturb me for a minute or so." His eyes half closed.

Gusterson studied Fay's sunken-cheeked face and the great puff of his shoulder cape.

"Say, Fay," he asked in a soft voice after about five minutes, "are you meditating?"

"Why, no," Fay responded, starting up and then stifling another yawn. "Just resting a bit. I seem to get more tired these days, somehow. You'll have to excuse me, Gussy. But what made you think of meditation?"

"Oh, I just got to wonderin' in that direction," Gusterson said. "You see, when you first started to develop Tickler, it occurred to me that there was one thing about it that might be real good even if you did give it S&DM elements. It's this: having a mech secretary to take charge of his obligations and routine in the real world might allow a man to slide into the other world, the world of thoughts and feelings and intuitions, and sort of ooze around in there and accomplish things. Know any of the people using Tickler that way, hey?"

"Of course not," Fay denied with a bright incredulous laugh. "Who'd want to loaf around in an imaginary world and take a chance of *missing out on what his tickler's doing?* — I mean, on what his tickler has in store for him — what he's *told* his tickler to have in store for him."

Ignoring Gusterson's shiver, Fay straightened up and seemed to brisken himself. "Ha, that little slump did me good. A tickler *makes* you rest, you know — it's one of the great things about it. Pooh-Bah's kinder to me than I ever was to myself." He buttoned open a tiny refrigerator and

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took out two waxed cardboard cubes and handed one to Gusterson. "Martini? Hope you don't mind drinking from the carton. Cheers. Now, Gussy old pal, there are two matters I want to take up with you — "

"Hold it," Gusterson said with something of his old authority. "There's something I got to get off my mind first." He pulled the typed pages out of his inside pocket and straightened them. "I told you about these," he said. "I want you to read them before you do anything else. Here."

Fay looked toward the pages and nodded, but did not take them yet. He lifted his hands to his throat and unhooked the clasp of his cape, then hesitated.

"You wear that thing to hide the hump your tickler makes?" Gusterson filled in. "You got better taste than those other moles."

"Not to hide it, exactly," Fay protested, "but just so the others won't be jealous. I wouldn't feel comfortable parading a free-scanning decision-capable Mark 6 tickler in front of people who can't buy it — until it goes on open sale at twenty-two fifteen tonight. Lot of shelterfolk won't be sleeping tonight. They'll be queued up to trade in their old tickler for a Mark 6 almost as good as Pooh-Bah."

He started to jerk his hands apart, hesitated again with an oddly apprehensive look at the big man, then whirled off the cape.

VI

GUSTERSON sucked in such a big gasp that he hiccuped. The right shoulder of Fay's jacket and shirt had been cut away. Thrusting up through the neatly hemmed hole was a silvery gray hump with a one-eyed turret atop it and two multi-jointed metal arms ending in little claws.

It looked like the top half of a pseudo-science robot — a squat evil child robot, Gusterson told himself, which had lost its legs in a railway accident — and it seemed to him that a red fleck was moving around imperceptibly in the huge single eye.

"I'll take that memo now," Fay said coolly, reaching out his hand. He caught the rustling sheets as they slipped from Gusterson's fingers, evened them up very precisely by tapping them on his knee . . . and then handed them over his shoulder to his tickler, which clicked its claws around either margin and then began rather swiftly to lift the top sheet past its single eye at a distance of about six inches.

"The first matter I want to take up with you, Gussy," Fay began, paying no attention whatsoever to the little scene on his

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shoulder, "— or warn you about, rather — is the imminent ticklerization of schoolchildren, geriatrics, convicts and topsiders. At three zero zero tomorrow ticklers become mandatory for all adult shelterfolk. The mop-up operations won't be long in coming — in fact, these days we find that the square root of the estimated time of a new development is generally the best time estimate. Gussy, I strongly advise you to start wearing a tickler now. And Daisy and your moppets. If you heed my advice, your kids will have the jump on your class. Transition and conditioning are easy, since Tickler itself sees to it."

Pooh-Bah leafed the first page to the back of the packet and began lifting the second past his eye — a little more swiftly than the first.

"I've got a Mark 6 tickler all warmed up for you," Fay pressed, "*and* a shoulder cape. You won't feel one bit conspicuous." He noticed the direction of Gusterson's gaze and remarked, "Fascinating mechanism, isn't it? Of course 28 pounds are a bit oppressive, but then you have to remember it's only a way-station to free-floating Mark 7 or 8."

Pooh-Bah finished page two and began to race through page three.

"But I wanted *you* to read it," Gusterson said bemusedly, staring.

"Pooh-Bah will do a better job than I could," Fay assured him. "Get the gist without losing the chaff."

"But dammit, it's all about *him*," Gusterson said a little more strongly. "He won't be objective about it."

"A better job," Fay reiterated, "*and* more fully objective. Pooh-Bah's set for full precis. Stop worrying about it. He's a dispassionate machine, not a fallible, emotionally disturbed human misled by the will-o'-the-wisp of consciousness. Second matter: Micro Systems is impressed by your contributions to Tickler and will recruit you as a senior consultant with a salary and thinking box as big as my own, family quarters to match. It's an unheard-of high start. Gussy, I think you'd be a fool—"

HE BROKE off, held up a hand for silence, and his eyes got a listening look. Pooh-Bah had finished page six and was holding the packet motionless. After about ten seconds Fay's face broke into a big fake smile. He stood up, suppressing a wince, and held out his hand. "Gussy," he said loudly, "I am happy to inform you that all your fears about Tickler are so much thistledown. My word on it. There's

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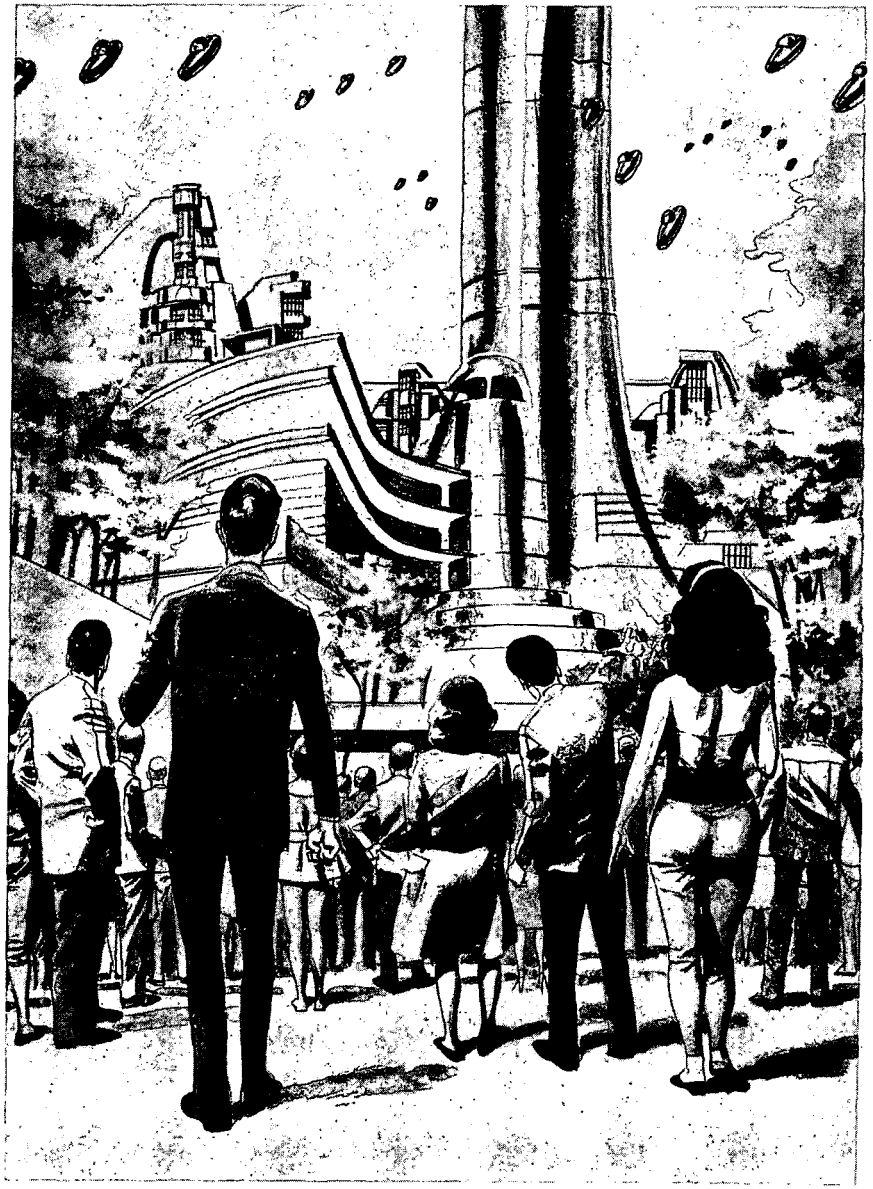

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nothing to them at all. Pooh-Bah's precis, which he's just given to me, proves it."

"Look," Gusterson said solemnly, "there's one thing I want you to do. Purely to humor an old friend. But I want you to do it. *Read that memo yourself.*"

"Certainly I will, Gussy," Fay continued in the same ebullient tones. "I'll read it—" he twitched and his smile disappeared — "a little later."

"Sure," Gusterson said dully, holding his hand to his stomach. "And now if you don't mind, Fay, I'm goin' home. I feel just a bit sick. Maybe the ozone and the other additives in your shelter air are too heady for me. It's been years since I tramped through a pine forest."

"But Gussy! You've hardly got here. You haven't even sat down. Have another martini. Have a seltzer pill. Have a whiff of oxy. Have a—"

"No, Fay, I'm going home right away. I'll think about the job offer. *Remember to read that memo.*"

"I will, Gussy, I certainly will. You know your way? The button takes you through the wall. 'By, now."

He sat down abruptly and looked away. Gusterson pushed through the swinging door. He tensed himself for the step across onto the slowly-moving reverse ribbon. Then on a impulse he pushed ajar the swinging door and looked back inside.

Fay was sitting as he'd left him, apparently lost in listless brooding. On his shoulder Pooh-Bah was rapidly crossing and uncrossing its little metal arms, tearing the memo to smaller and smaller shreds. It let the scraps drift slowly toward the floor and oddly writhed its three-elbowed left arm . . . and then Gusterson knew from whom, or rather from what, Fay had copied his new shrug.

VII

WHEN Gusterson got home toward the end of the second dog watch, he slipped aside from Daisy's questions and set the children laughing with a graphic enactment of his slide-standing technique and a story about getting his head caught in a thinking box built for a midget physicist. After supper he played with Imogene, Iago and Claudius until it was their bedtime and thereafter was unusually attentive to Daisy, admiring her fading green stripes, though he did spend a while in the next apartment, where they stored their outdoor camping equipment.

But the next morning he announced to the children that it was a holiday — the Feast of St.

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Gusterson—and then took Daisy into the bedroom and told her everything.

When he'd finished she said, "This is something I've got to see for myself."

Gusterson shrugged. "If you think you've got to. I say we should head for the hills right now. One thing I'm standing on: the kids aren't going back to school."

"Agreed," Daisy said. "But, Gusterson, we've lived through a lot of things without leaving home altogether. We lived through the Everybody-Six-Feet-Underground-by-Christmas campaign and the Robot Watchdog craze, when you got your left foot half chewed off. We lived through the Venomous Bats and Indoctrinated Saboteur Rats and the Hypnotized Monkey-Paratrooper scares. We lived through the Voice of Safety and Anti-Communist Somno-Instruction and Rightest Pills and Jet-Propelled Vigilantes. We lived through the Cold-Out, when you weren't supposed to turn on a toaster for fear its heat would be a target for prowl missiles and when people with fevers were unpopular. We lived through—"

Gusterson patted her hand. "You go below," he said. "Come back when you've decided this is different. Come back as soon as you can anyway. I'll be worried about you every minute you're down there."

When she was gone — in a green suit and hat to minimize or at least justify the effect of the faded stripes — Gusterson doled out to the children provender and equipment for a camping expedition to the next floor. Iago led them off in stealthy Indian file. Leaving the hall door open Gusterson got out his .38 and cleaned and loaded it, meanwhile concentrating on a chess problem with the idea of confusing a hypothetical psionic monitor. By the time he had hid the revolver again he heard the elevator creaking back up.

DAISY came dragging in without her hat, looking as if she'd been concentrating on a chess problem for hours herself and just now given up. Her stripes seemed to have vanished; then Gusterson decided this was because her whole complexion was a touch green.

She sat down on the edge of the couch and said without looking at him, "Did you tell me, Gusterson, that everybody was quiet and abstracted and orderly down below, especially the ones wearing ticklers, meaning pretty much everybody?"

"I did," he said. "I take it that's no longer the case. What are the new symptoms?"

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She gave no indication. After some time she said, "Gusterson, do you remember the Doré illustrations to the *Inferno?* Can you visualize the paintings of Hieronymous Bosch with the hordes of proto-Freudian devils tormenting people all over the farmyard and city square? Did you ever see the Disney animations of Moussorgsky's witches' sabbath music? Back in the foolish days before you married me, did that drug-addict girl friend of yours ever take you to genuine orgy?"

"As bad as that, hey?"

She nodded emphatically and all of a sudden shivered violently. "Several shades worse," she said. "If they decide to come topside—" She shot up. "Where are the kids?"

"Upstairs campin' in the mysterious wilderness of the 21st floor," Gusterson reassured her. "Let's leave 'em there until we're ready to—"

He broke off. They both heard the faint sound of thudding footsteps.

"They're on the stairs," Daisy whispered, starting to move toward the open door. "But are they coming from up or down?"

"It's just one person," judged Gusterson, moving after his wife. "Too heavy for one of the kids."

The footsteps doubled in volume and came rapidly closer. Along with them there was an agonized gasping. Daisy stopped, staring fearfully at the open doorway. Gusterson moved past her. Then he stopped too.

Fay stumbled into view and would have fallen on his face except he clutched both sides of the doorway halfway up. He was stripped to the waist. There was a little blood on his shoulder. His narrow chest was arching convulsively, the ribs standing out starkly, as he sucked in oxygen to replace what he'd burned up running up twenty flights. His eyes were wild.

"They've taken over," he panted. Another gobbling breath. "Gone crazy." Two more gasps. "Gotta stop 'em."

His eyes filmed. He swayed forward. Then Gusterson's big arms were around him and he was carrying him to the couch.

DAISY came running from the kitchen with a damp cool towel. Gusterson took it from her and began to mop Fay off. He sucked in his own breath as he saw that Fay's right ear was raw and torn. He whispered to Daisy, "Look at where the thing savaged him."

The blood on Fay's shoulder came from his ear. Some of it stained a flush-skin plastic fitting that had two small valved holes in it and that puzzled Gusterson until he remembered that Mood-

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master tied into the bloodstream. For a second he thought he was going to vomit.

The dazed look slid aside from Fay's eyes. He was gasping less painfully now. He sat up, pushing the towel away, buried his face in his hands for a few seconds, then looked over the fingers at the two of them.

"I've been living in a nightmare for the last week," he said in a taut small voice, "knowing the thing had come alive and trying to pretend to myself that it hadn't. Knowing it was taking charge of me more and more. Having it whisper in my ear, over and over again, in a cracked little rhyme that I could only hear every hundredth time, 'Day by day, in every way, you're learning to listen . . . and *obey*. Day by day—'"

His voice started to go high. He pulled it down and continued harshly, "I ditched it this morning when I showered. It let me break contact to do that. It must have figured it had complete control of me, mounted or dismounted. I think it's telepathic, and then it did some, well, rather unpleasant things to me late last night. But I pulled together my fears and my will and I ran for it. The slidewalks were chaos. The Mark 6 ticklers showed some purpose, though I couldn't tell you what, but as far as I could see the Mark 3s and 4s were just cootching their mounts to death — Chinese feather torture. Giggling, gasping, choking . . . gales of mirth. People are dying of laughter . . . ticklers! . . . the irony of it! It was the complete lack of order and sanity and that let me get topside. There were things I saw—" Once again his voice went shrill. He clapped his hand to his mouth and rocked back and forth on the couch.

Gusterson gently but firmly laid a hand on his good shoulder. "Steady," he said. "Here, swallow this."

Fay shoved aside the short brown drink. "We've got to stop them," he cried. "Mobilize the topsiders — contact the wilderness patrols and manned satellites — pour ether in the tunnel airpumps — invent and crash-manufacture missiles that will home on ticklers without harming humans — SOS Mars and Venus — dope the shelter water supply — do something! Gussy, you don't realize what people are going through down there every second."

"I think they're experiencing the ultimate in outer-directedness," Gusterson said gruffly.

"Have you no heart?" Gay demanded. His eyes widened, as if he were seeing Gusterson for the first time. Then, accusingly, pointing a shaking finger: "*You in-*

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vented the tickler, George Gusterson! It's all your fault! You've got to do something about it!"

Before Gusterson could retort to that, or begin to think of a reply, or even assimilate the full enormity of Fay's statement, he was grabbed from behind and frog-marched away from Fay and something that felt remarkably like the muzzle of a large-caliber gun was shoved in the small of his back.

UNDER COVER of Fay's outburst a huge crowd of people had entered the room from the hall — eight, to be exact. But the weirdest thing about them to Gusterson was that from the first instant he had the impression that only one mind had entered the room and that it did not reside in any of the eight persons, even though he recognized three of them, but in something that they were carrying.

Several things contributed to this impression. The eight people all had the same blank expression — watchful yet empty-eyed. They all moved in the same slithery crouch. And they had all taken off their shoes. Perhaps, Gusterson thought wildly, they believed he and Daisy ran a Japanese flat.

Gusterson was being held by two burly women, one of them quite pimply. He considered stamping on her toes, but just at that moment the gun dug in his back with a corkscrew movement.

The man holding the gun on him was Fay's colleague Davidson. Some yards beyond Fay's couch, Kester was holding a gun on Daisy, without digging it into her, while the single strange man holding Daisy herself was doing so quite decorously — a circumstance which afforded Gusterson minor relief, since it made him feel less guilty about not going berserk.

Two more strange men, one of them in purple lounging pajamas, the other in the gray uniform of a slidewalk inspector, had grabbed Fay's skinny upper arms, one on either side, and were lifting him to his feet, while Fay was struggling with such desperate futility and gibbering so pitifully that Gusterson momentarily had second thoughts about the moral imperative to go berserk when menaced by hostile force. But again the gun dug into him with a twist.

Approaching Fay face-on was the third Micro-man Gusterson had met yesterday — Hazen. It was Hazen who was carrying — quite reverently or solemnly — or at any rate very carefully the object that seemed to Gusterson to be the mind of the little storm troop presently desecrating the

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sanctity of his own individual home.

All of them were wearing ticklers, of course — the three Micromen the heavy emergent Mark 6s with their clawed and jointed arms and monocular cephalic turrets, the rest lower-numbered Marks of the sort that merely made Richard-the-Third humps under clothing.

The object that Hazen was carrying was the Mark 6 tickler Gusterson had seen Fay wearing yesterday. Gusterson was sure it was Pooh-Bah because of its air of command, and because he would have sworn on a mountain of Bibles that he recognized the red fleck lurking in the back of its single eye. And Pooh-Bah alone had the aura of full conscious thought. Pooh-Bah alone had mana.

IT IS NOT good to see an evil legless child robot with dangling straps bossing — apparently by telepathic power — not only three objects of its own kind and five close primitive relatives, but also eight human beings . . . and in addition throwing into a state of twitching terror one miserable, thin-chested, half-crazy research-and-development director.

Pooh-Bah pointed a claw at Fay. Fay's handlers dragged him forward, still resisting but more feebly now, as if half-hypnotized or at least cowed.

Gusterson grunted an outraged, "Hey!" and automatically struggled a bit, but once more the gun dug in. Daisy shut her eyes, then firmed her mouth and opened them again to look.

Seating the tickler on Fay's shoulder took a little time, because two blunt spikes in its bottom had to be fitted into the valved holes in the flush-skin plastic disk. When at last they plunged home Gusterson felt very sick indeed — and then even more so, as the tickler itself poked a tiny pellet on a fine wire into Fay's ear.

The next moment Fay had straightened up and motioned his handlers aside. He tightened the straps of his tickler around his chest and under his armpits. He held out a hand and someone gave him a shoulderless shirt and coat. He slipped into them smoothly, Pooh-Bah dexterously using its little claws to help put its turret and body through the neatly hemmed holes. The small storm troop looked at Fay with deferential expectation. He held still for a moment, as if thinking, and then walked over to Gusterson and looked him in the face and again held still.

Fay's expression was jaunty on the surface, agonized underneath. Gusterson knew that he wasn't

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thinking at all, but only listening for instructions from something that was whispering on the very threshold of his inner ear.

"Gussy, old boy," Fay said, twitching a depthless grin, "I'd be very much obliged if you'd answer a few simple questions." His voice was hoarse at first but he swallowed twice and corrected that. "What exactly did you have in mind when you invented ticklers? What exactly are they supposed to be?"

"Why, you miserable — " Gusterson began in a kind of confused horror, then got hold of himself and said curtly, "They were supposed to be mech reminders. They were supposed to record memoranda and — "

Fay held up a palm and shook his head and again listened for a space. Then, "That's how ticklers were supposed to be of use to humans," he said. "I don't mean that at all. I mean how ticklers were supposed to be of use to themselves. Surely you had some notion." Fay wet his lips. "If it's any help," he added, "keep in mind that it's not Fay who's asking this question, but Pooh-Bah."

Gusterson hesitated. He had the feeling that every one of the eight dual beings in the room was hanging on his answer and that something was boring into his mind and turning over his next thoughts and peering at and under them before he had a chance to scan them himself. Pooh-Bah's eye was like a red searchlight.

"Go on," Fay prompted. "What were ticklers supposed to be — for themselves?"

"Nothin'," Gusterson said softly. "Nothin' at all."

HE COULD FEEL the disappointment well up in the room — and with it a touch of something like panic.

This time Fay listened for quite a long while. "I hope you don't mean that, Gussy," he said at last very earnestly. "I mean, I hope you hunt deep and find some ideas you forgot, or maybe never realized you had at the time. Let me put it to you differently. What's the place of ticklers in the natural scheme of things? What's their aim in life? Their special reason? Their genius? Their final cause? What gods should ticklers worship?"

But Gunderson was already shaking his head. He said, "I don't know anything about that at all."

Fay sighed and gave simultaneously with Pooh-Bah the now-familiar triple-joined shrug. Then the man briskened himself. "I guess that's as far as we can get right now," he said. "Keep thinking, Gussy. Try to remember something. You won't be able

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to leave your apartment — I'm setting guards. If you want to see me, tell them. Or just think — In due course you'll be questioned further in any case. Perhaps by special methods. Perhaps you'll be ticklerized. That's all. Come on, everybody, let's get going."

The pimply woman and her pal let go of Gusterson, Daisy's man loosed his decorous hold, Davidson and Kester sidled away with an eye behind them and the little storm troop trudged out.

Fay looked back in the doorway. "I'm sorry, Gussy," he said and for a moment his old self looked out of his eyes. "I wish I could — " A claw reached for his ear, a spasm of pain crossed his face, he stiffened and marched off. The door shut.

Gusterson took two deep breaths that were close to angry sobs. Then, still breathing stentorously, he stamped into the bedroom.

"What — ?" Daisy asked, looking after him.

He came back carrying his .38 and headed for the door.

"What are you up to?" she demanded, knowing very well.

"I'm going to blast that iron monkey off Fay's back if it's the last thing I do!"

She threw her arms around him.

"Now lemme go," Gusterson growled. "I gotta be a man one time anyway."

As they struggled for the gun, the door opened noiselessly, Davidson slipped in and deftly snatched the weapon out of their hands before they realized he was there. He said nothing, only smiled at them and shook his head in sad reproof as he went out.

GUSTERSON slumped. "I *knew* they were all psionic," he said softly. "I just got out of control now — that last look Fay gave us." He touched Daisy's arm. "Thanks, kid."

He walked to the glass wall and looked out desultorily. After a while he turned and said, "Maybe you better be with the kids, hey? I imagine the guards'll let you through."

Daisy shook her head. "The kids never come home until supper. For the next few hours they'll be safer without me."

Gusterson nodded vaguely, sat down on the couch and propped his chin on the base of his palm. After a while his brow smoothed and Daisy knew that the wheels had started to turn inside and the electrons to jump around — except that she reminded herself to permanently cross out those particular figures of speech from her vocabulary.

After about half an hour Gus-

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terson said softly, "I think the ticklers are so psionic that it's as if they just had one mind. If I were with them very long I'd start to be part of that mind. Say something to one of them and you say it to all."

Fifteen minutes later: "They're not crazy, they're just newborn. The ones that were creating a cootching chaos downstairs were like babies kickin' their legs and wavin' their eyes, tryin' to see what their bodies could do. Too bad their bodies are us."

Ten minutes more: "I gotta do something about it. Fay's right. It's all my fault. He's just the apprentice; I'm the old sorcerer himself."

Five minutes more, gloomily: "Maybe it's man's destiny to build live machines and then bow out of the cosmic picture. Except the ticklers need us, dammit, just like nomads need horses,"

Another five minutes: "Maybe somebody could dream up a purpose in life for ticklers. Even a religion — the First Church of Pooh-Bah Tickler. But I hate selling other people spiritual ideas and that'd still leave ticklers parasitic on humans . . ."

As he murmured those last words Gusterson's eyes got wide as a maniac's and a big smile reached for his ears. He stood up and faced himself toward the door.

"What are you intending to do now?" Daisy asked flatly.

"I'm merely goin' out an' save the world," he told her. "I may be back for supper and I may not."

VIII

DAVIDSON pushed out from the wall against which he'd been resting himself and his two-stone tickler and moved to block the hall. But Gusterson simply walked up to him. He shook his hand warmly and looked his tickler full in the eye and said in a ringing voice, "Ticklers should have bodies of their own!" He paused and then added casually, "Come on, let's visit your boss."

Davidson listened for instructions and then nodded. But he watched Gusterson warily as they walked down the hall.

In the elevator Gusterson repeated his message to the second guard, who turned out to be the pimply woman, now wearing shoes. This time he added, "Ticklers shouldn't be tied to the frail bodies of humans, which need a lot of thoughtful supervision and drug-injecting and can't even fly."

Crossing the park, Gusterson stopped a hump-backed soldier and informed him, "Ticklers gotta cut the apron string and snap the silver cord and go out in the universe and find their own pur-

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poses." Davidson and the pimply woman didn't interfere. They merely waited and watched and then led Gusterson on.

On the escaladder he told someone, "It's cruel to tie ticklers to slow-witted snaily humans when ticklers can think and live . . . ten thousand times as fast," he finished, plucking the figure from the murk of his unconscious.

By the time they got to the bottom, the message had become, "Ticklers should have a planet of their own!"

They never did catch up with Fay, although they spent two hours skimming around on slidewalks, under the subterranean stars, pursuing rumors of his presence. Clearly the boss tickler (which was how they thought of Pooh-bah) led an energetic life. Gusterson continued to deliver his message to all and sundry at 30-second intervals. Toward the end he found himself doing it in a dreamy and forgetful way. His mind, he decided, was becoming assimilated to the communal telepathic mind of the ticklers. It did not seem to matter at the time.

After two hours Gusterson realized that he and his guides were becoming part of a general movement of people, a flow as mindless as that of blood corpuscles through the veins, yet at the same time dimly purposeful — at least there was the feeling that it was at the behest of a mind far above.

The flow was topside. All the slidewalks seemed to lead to the concourses and the escaladders. Gusterson found himself part of a human stream moving into the tickler factory adjacent to his apartment — or another factory very much like it.

THEREAFTER Gusterson's awarenesses were dimmed. It was as if a bigger mind were doing the remembering for him and it were permissible and even mandatory for him to dream his way along. He knew vaguely that days were passing. He knew he had work of a sort: at one time he was bringing food to gaunt-eyed tickler-mounted humans working feverishly in a production line — human hands and tickler claws working together in a blur of rapidity on silvery mechanisms that moved along jumpily on a great belt; at another he was sweeping piles of metal scraps and garbage down a gray corridor.

Two scenes stood out a little more vividly.

A windowless wall had been knocked out for twenty feet. There was blue sky outside, its light almost hurtful, and a drop of many stories. A file of humans were being processed. When one

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of them got to the head of the file his (or her) tickler was ceremoniously unstrapped from his shoulder and welded onto a silvery cask with smoothly pointed ends. The result was something that looked — at least in the case of the Mark 6 ticklers — like a stubby silver submarine, child size. It would hum gently, lift off the floor and then fly slowly out through the big blue gap. Then the next tickler-ridden human would step forward for processing.

The second scene was in a park, the sky again blue, but big and high with an argosy of white clouds. Gusterson was lined up in a crowd of humans that stretched as far as he could see, row on irregular row. Martial music was playing. Overhead hovered a flock of little silver submarines, lined up rather more orderly in the air than the humans were on the ground. The music rose to a heart-quickening climax. The tickler nearest Gusterson gave (as if to say, "And now — who knows?") a triple-jointed shrug that stung his memory. Then the ticklers took off straight up on their new and shining bodies. They became a flight of silver geese . . . of silver midges . . . and the humans around Gusterson lifted a ragged cheer . . .

That scene marked the beginning of the return of Gusterson's mind and memory. He shuffled around for a bit, spoke vaguely to three or four people he recalled from the dream days, and then headed for home and supper —three weeks late, and as disoriented and emaciated as a bear coming out of hibernation.

SIX MONTHS later Fay was having dinner with Daisy and Gusterson. The cocktails had been poured and the children were playing in the next apartment. The transparent violet walls brightened, then gloomed, as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Gusterson said, "I see where a spaceship out beyond the orbit of Mars was holed by a tickler. I wonder where the little guys are headed now?"

Fay started to give a writhing left-armed shrug, but stopped himself with a grimace.

"Maybe out of the solar system altogether," suggested Daisy, who'd recently dyed her hair fire-engine red and was wearing red leotards.

"They got a weary trip ahead of them," Gusterson said, "unless they work out a hyper-Einsteinian drive on the way."

Fay grimaced again. He was still looking rather peaked. He said plaintively, "Haven't we heard enough about ticklers for a while?"

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"I guess so," Gusterson agreed, "but I get to wondering about the little guys. They were so serious and intense about everything. I never did solve their problem, you know. I just shifted it onto other shoulders than ours. No joke intended," he hurried to add.

Fay forbore to comment. "By the way, Gussy," he said, "have you heard anything from the Red Cross about that world-saving medal I nominated you for? I know you think the whole concept of world-saving medals is ridiculous, especially when they started giving them to all heads of state who didn't start atomic wars while in office, but — "

"Nary a peep," Gusterson told him. "I'm not proud, Fay. I could use a few world-savin' medals. I'd start a flurry in the old-gold market. But I don't worry about those things. I don't have time to. I'm busy these days thinkin' up a bunch of new inventions."

"Gussy!" Fay said sharply, his face tightening in alarm, "Have you forgotten your promise?"

" 'Course not, Fay. My new inventions aren't for Micro or any other firm. They're just a legitimate part of my literary endeavors. Happens my next insanity novel is goin' to be about a mad inventor."

— FRITZ LEIBER

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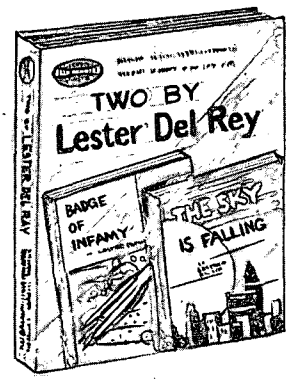

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Fearsome the aliens were. Terrible was his plight. But Dr. Goldpepper fought on, confident in the ultimate triumph of American Dental Science!

Illustrated by GAUGHAN By AVRAM DAVIDSON

DR. MORRIS GOLDPEPPER RETURNS

JAMES E. (for Elphonsus) Dandy paced the floor of the office of his ranch at Tishomingo, the showplace of the State of Texas (and hence not to be confused with any ranch which might be located in or at Tishomingo, Oklahoma), in a manner which can only be described as restless. From time to time he sought, like Boethius, the consolations of philosophy — using this word in its former interpretation as meaning "science" — from his bookshelf. But for once, the writings of Crowe, Holwager, Barrett, Shields and Williams — not to mention Oliver — for once the writings of these great scientific pioneers failed either to console or to absorb him. His burden was heavy. His need was great. His pace was restless.

Some distance away, exactly how much is unnecessary to state in terms of exact precision, all things (as the great Einstein has taught us) being relative: what counts as a long way in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations is a mere jaunt in Texas . . . some distance away, to continue, a pretty and personable young person of the female persuasion was weeping bitterly. Great tears rolled from her large eyes and down her soft cheeks.

"But Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" she pled and implored. "None of that is 'Little Jimmy's' fault. Why

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can't we get married, Daddy, Daddy, please?"

Her name was Mary Jane Crawford. The man whom she addressed in terms of filial allegiance was her father, Dr. Clement (or "Clem") Crawford, a landowner and husbandman; in other words, a rancher; besides holding the *éclat* of a degree in Dental Medicine.

The question instantly and quite properly arises, why was this last fact not mentioned first, and the answer is that Dr. "Clem" Crawford — or "Doc," a familiarity and diminutive which would give justified offense in large centers of populous habitation such as cities, but which in rural areas may be, and often is, used without offense — "Doc Clem" Crawford had for some years given over and retired from active practice of this highly important profession, and had since devoted his time to agriculture and its allied crafts.

"Mary Jane," he said, somewhat testily, "I wish you'd quit all that bawling. I didn't say you couldn't marry 'Little Jimmy', I only said you couldn't marry him *now*. It's not his fault that 'Big Jimmy' got himself into this pickle. But all he's got in this world is his share of whatever his daddy's got, and it looks like there's a powerful big chance his daddy might *lose* whatever he's got. I just couldn't hardly bear to think of my little girl having to rough it, cooped up in some little old ten-room house. 'Course, you could go right on living *here* and 'Little Jimmy' could work for *me*. But no. He's just as bullheaded as his daddy."

Mary Jane went off, disconsolate and unhappy. Her father continued to sit in his chair, as if brooding over his daughter's affairs, but the fact is that he had unwelcome worries of his own.

IN the vast kitchen of the Crawford ranch-house a comely woman of middle age was engaged in baking pies of fruits and other delicious comestibles. This was Mrs. Doothit, the housekeeper, a widow-woman, as the local vernacular idiom has it. There had been a time when she felt that she had reason to believe an interest in her existed on the part of her employer, Dr. Clement ("Clem") Crawford — who was a widower — which was separate and apart from such considerations as her flaky and juicy pies, her toothsome steaks, her savory coffee, and delicious roasts . . . though by no means diminished by them.

During this time she thought she was aware of a certain look in her employer's eye, and a certain tone in his voice. But that time had passed, and with it had

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passed much of Mrs. Doothit's interest in her work. She had even been considering taking a position as housemother in an establishment for underprivileged girls that was maintained in a suburb of Dallas by the Southern Baptist Convention.

But she put off making this decision from day to day.

Upstairs, in the spacious suite of rooms generously put at his disposal by his host, Clement (Clem") Crawford, DDM (Ret.), was yet another of the *dramatis personae,* or cast of characters, of the narration which we now peruse, namely and videlicet one Morris Goldpepper, Doctor of Dental Surgery, inventor of the Goldpepper Bridge and the Goldpepper Crown, and perfector of the Semi-Retractable Clasp which bears his name. He is as it were, the Livy, Macrobius or Gibbon of this annal. (Modesty, epitomized by my automatic shrinking from the spotlight, obliges me — with this one exception — to cleave to the Third Person previously and henceforth.)

The suite of rooms was a veritable apartment of its own, consisting of a sleeping chamber, a lounge, an office, a kitchen, a bar (which Dr. Goldpepper's well-known temperate habits rendered about as useful as certain mammalian appurtenances on a boar), a games-room and what had previously been another sleeping chamber but which had been converted at no small cost and effort into a laboratory for the fabrication and synthesis of dental prosthetic devices.

All this had been done out of pure generosity, affection and respect by Dr. Crawford on behalf of his old Navy Dental Corps "buddy", Dr. Goldpepper.

It is not to be thought that Dr. Goldpepper had surrendered occupancy of his bachelor apartment in the Hotel Davenport, nor yet of his laboratory on Broadway in the Upper West 70s, in order to live the life of a country squire in the sylvan or (considering the sparseness of trees) semi-sylvan fastnesses of John C. Calhoun County, Texas. The facts of the matter, not altogether pleasant, are that he was undergoing the long and delicate process of recuperation intendant upon the aftermaths of his rescue from the grasp and clutches of the malevolent inhabitants of a distant planet in another part of the Galaxy, the captivation and captivity whereon has already been recorded in these pages; anent which, enough — no point in chewing a twice-told tale.

At any rate, Dr. Goldpepper rested in his luxuriously appointed guest quarters. He took long walks around the ranch, de-

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lighted in the verdant greenery of its crops and the rolling undulation of its hills. And, for the first time since his boyhood, he recommenced the gentle piscatorial craft or pastime of angling.

The M Bar L Ranch (named after the Honorable Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar, sometime President of the Republic of Texas, and a boyhood idol of "Doc Clem") was located on the Little Comanche River. To those used to the Majestic Hudson and the navigable East, the application "river" to what others might well deem a mere creek is at first difficult. However that may be, the waters of the Little Comanche teemed with trout, bass and other edible species of fish. Dr. Goldpepper considered himself too impatient to undertake mastery of dry- or even wet-fly fishing, but his efficient host kept his bait box supplied with worms of a most surprising stature or length, and, thus aided, the guest seldom failed to come home with something in his creel besides air.

IT WAS on the day on which our story opened that Dr. Goldpepper returned from a circumambulation of the scenery and was told by his host that someone was waiting to see him.

"Waiting to see *me?*" was his surprised rejoinder. "*Who*?"

"*I* don't know, 'Morry,'" said Doctor "Clem." "Some little old man."

Put completely off guard by his awareness of the Texan habit of placing the words *little* and *old* before almost any odd noun — a "little old baby," "a little old elephant" or "brontosaurus" — Dr. Goldpepper was therefore astonished to see that the personage waiting for him *was* literally little and — to all outward presages — old.

But in another fraction of a second he recognized the typical blue gums in the individual's mouth, open in a fawning sort of false, deceitful smile, and recognized himself to be in the presence of a member of the hideous and alien race whose unwilling captive he had been on far-off Upsilon Centauri (as he had with wry humor denominated it to himself, to avoid becoming embittered.)

Startled, Dr. Goldpepper uttered a cry of surprise. Inadvertently he stepped behind "Doc" Crawford, who inquired, "'Morry,' what in the Hell is the matter?"

Goldpepper lashed out fearlessly at the invader with his fishing-rod, but the diminutive alien evaded the blow and groveled on the floor, crying, "Have kindness, Merciful Goldpepper!" and attempted to place his head beneath Goldpepper's foot.

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Once it was realized that this was a sign of submission,—indeed of homage or obeisance, and not some sort of wrestling hold, the latter at once became calm.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous intrusion?" Dr. Goldpepper demanded, sternly and outraged. "Is it your intention to abduct me yet another time, as if I hadn't had enough *tsuris* already?"

"Assist, assist, Benevolent Goldpepper!" the alien wailed as he writhed on a floor-rug made from the pelts of fifty-four coyotes shot by the owner of the M Bar L. "Forgive, Great Dentist of the Ages!"

Seizing the unwelcome one by the scruff of his collar while he was still attempting his act of vasselage, Dr. Crawford inquired, in some amazement, "Do you mean to tell me, 'Morry,' that this little old thing was one of the gang that kidnapped you?"

"It was not by violence, but by subterfuge," said the erstwhile victim, wearily. "And I don't care to dwell on the subject. Ask him to leave."

"'*Ask*' him?!" Dr. Crawford exclaimed with an oath, opening the door and flinging the intruder out with some measure of violence. He then summoned one of his employees, a tall, dark and ugly man with only one eye, known as 'Ojito' Gonzales, and on whose head there was declared to be in the State of Chihuahua (or it might be Sonora) an unofficial reward of ten thousand pesos. He enjoined the Mexican not to allow the extraterrestrial upon the premises again under pain of severe displeasure.

Much shaken by these events, Dr. Goldfellow allowed himself to be persuaded to take a small glass of Bourbon whiskey, and Mrs. Doothit made him some strong coffee.

WHILE the agitation produced by these untoward events had yet to die down, a sound of an automobile was heard outside in the driveway. Looking out the window, those inside perceived the well-known palomino Cadillac of James E. (for Elphonsus) "Big Jimmy" Dandy. Seated with him was his son "Little Jimmy," a perfect example of hyperbole, or exaggeration not intended to deceive, for it was obvious to the naked eye that "Little" Jimmy was at least six feet six inches tall, and had an open and pleasant face. It was a source of sorrow to Dr. Morris Goldpepper that circumstances beyond his control were providing impediments to the marriage of this young man to Mary Jane Crawford, of whom he was very fond (in an avuncular way, she referring to him as

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"Uncle Morry" on occasions of conversational intimacy.)

The young man waved to them and then walked off with his fiancée, who had run out to meet him. His father looked at them, shook his head and walked slowly into the house.

"Howdy, 'Clem,'" he said, in greeting. "Howdy, 'Doc'" — referring to guest, not host.

"Anything new, 'Jimmy?'" Dr. Crawford inquired. As Mr. Dandy slowly shook his head, Dr. Crawford pressed his lips together. Then he rose. "I've got to tend to some business down at the south forty," he said. "You and Morry entertain one another, now. 'Jimmy,' you and your boy stay for dinner, now, hear?" And he disappeared. Plainly, he did not desire an occasion to arise for him and his friend to be alone together, doubtless for fear the subject of the postponed nuptials would be broached.

Doing his best to make conversation, Dr. Goldpepper inquired, "I wonder why people always talk about the *south* forty. How is it that a person seldom if ever hears mention of the *north* forty?"

But Mr. Dandy didn't rise to this intriguing ethno-ecological problem. He merely shook his head in a bemused fashion and said, "G — damn if *I* know, 'Doc.'" And then he sighed.

He was a typical Texas-type rancher: tall, reddened face, boots, Stetson.

He sighed again, looking at a mounted portion of a white-tailed deer which Dr. Crawford had, in rather questionable humor, placed over the mantle of the giant fireplace.

"Mr. Dandy — "

" 'Jimmy,' 'Doc.' "

" 'Jimmy' — forgive me for intruding on your own personal emotional difficulties, but if you won't mind — after all, although not a physician in the common sense of the word — let alone a psychiatrist, psychologist or psychoanalyst (whether Freudianly oriented or otherwise), still, in the long years of professional duty before I commenced the more solitary work of dental prosthesis, in my civilian practice as well as the United States Navy Dental Corps, I have had patients confide in me all manner of difficulties, and — "

Mr. Dandy groaned aloud. " 'Doc,' " he said, "do you know anybody who wants to buy fifteen million earthworms?"

THERE was a protracted period of silence.

Dr. Morris Goldpepper was convinced that the man's mind had snapped, thus causing a mental abberation of no mean proportion.

"How do you mean, 'fifteen mil-

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lion earthworms' ? " he inquired, cautiously. Delusions of the most multifarious kinds he had met with before, but this was something new.

"It's all the fault of that G — damn Federal Government," said Mr. Dandy. "If it wasn't for Them, I'd never of gotten in this here predicament. The least they could do is buy 'm off me. They buy surplus wheat, don't they? Butter? Cotton? Goober peas? Why, do you know that last year the Federal Government spent over eight million tax-dollars to keep up the price of lard?"

"What!" exclaimed Dr. Goldpepper, stung to the quick. "With my money?"

Mr. "Big Jimmy" Dandy smacked his right fist into his left palm. "Yes, sir, with your money! And with my money! But can I get some of it back when I need it? No, sir. Them and their G — damn flood control! Why, when I think of it — "

Wistfully, Dr. Morris Goldpepper thought of the perfectly equipped laboratory upstairs, with its neat array of wires of teeth, shellac trays, plaster, dental stone, denture trays, casting ovens and machines, Baldor lathes and Bunsen burners. Here he could have been at work on his favorite project, developing the Goldpepper Cap, instead of listening to the disjointing babblings of some backwoods anti-Federalist. He sighed.

"What is the precise or even approximate connection," he inquired, "between governmental projects for flood control, and the sale or purchase of earthworms?"

The rawboned, rugged rancher looked at him ruefully. "That's right," he said. "You're not from around here. You wouldn't know. Well, 'Doc,' the Federal Government was supposed to start this here flood control project of building dams along the Little Comanche, Big Comanche, Middle Comanche, Muddy Tom, Clear Tom and Bullhead River Valleys, which would provide twenty-seven new lakes. Now, you know, 'Doc,' lakes are pretty scarce in this part of Texas. I don't suppose there's more than one or two a man couldn't, uh, spit across, with a favorable wind behind him.

"So you can imagine what twenty-seven new lakes would mean. *Twenty-seven lakes!*"

"Hmm," said Dr. Morris Goldpepper thoughtfully.

Every fisherman in Texas, Mr. "Big Jimmy" declared enthusiastically, would flock to the new Lakes Area, to say nothing of multitudes from other states. It would be the biggest thing since the discovery of oil. "So naturally," he said, "I looked to increase my stock."

"Your stock?"

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"Yes. On my ranch."

Dr. Goldpepper, who had been thinking in terms of mutual funds, common and preferred, a subject about which he knew little or nothing, not being a speculator by nature, chuckled gently. "I see," he said. "Black Angus? Santa Gertrudis? Brahmas?" — terms he had acquired from his host, Clement ("Clem") Crawford, D.D.M. (Ret.). "You planned to sell meat to these visiting tourists? Barbecue? Hamburgers?"

Mr. Dandy cast a most peculiar look upon him. "Do you mean to say, 'Doc,' " he inquired, "that you don't know what kind of critters I raise on my ranch?"

In the embarrassed silence

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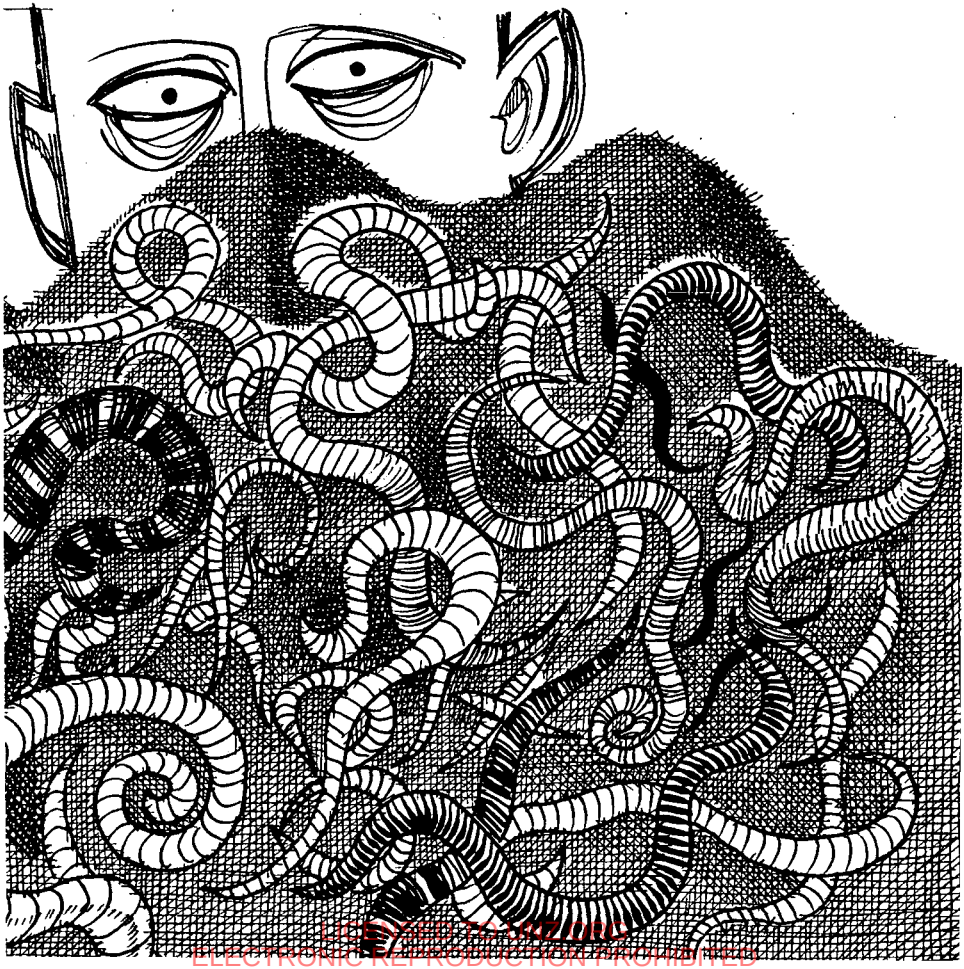
which followed they could hear the two young people who were walking by outside. Mary Jane was sobbing all over "Little Jimmy's" silk shirt and had soaked it to a transparency. He was patting her shoulders with his huge hands and saying, "Now, Honey. Now, Honey."

"Er — *what* kind?"

"In Texas, 'Doc,' when they say 'Jim Dandy,' they mean earthworms. And when they say 'earthworms,' they mean 'Jim Dandy.' Simultaneous terms, sir. Simultaneous terms. I started out with one worm tub twenty-five years ago and now I've got the largest worm ranch in the State of Texas! And that means in the



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world. One square mile of worm pits, 'Doc' — think of that. One square mile of worm sheds, worm tanks and worm boxes." He gazed into the far distances, a proud and dreamy look on his seamed face. "Earl B. Shields — you've heard of Earl B. Shields, everybody's heard of Earl B. Shields — Earl B. Shields devotes two whole chapters to me in *Commercial Earthworm Raising*. George H. Holwager's *Bigger and Better Red Worms* has fifteen illustrations of my ranch. Calls me 'a model for all progressive worm ranchers to follow!' What do you think of *that?* Barrett, Oliver, Crowe, Williams and the others, they all refer to me, yes, sir."

Then the look of exaltation vanished from his rugged features.

"But I raised my sights too far," he said. "It was the mere thought of them twenty-seven lakes and the folks flocking to all of'm that set me off. What a market for bait worms! And me setting right here in the middle of it, astride the main highway! I advertised, took whole pages in the *National Worm Rancher,* offered top prices — eight dollars per five hundred for Giants, five dollars per five hundred for Mediums and four dollars per five hundred for Run-of-the Pits. Offered purchase agreement guarantees for three years ahead . . ."

In order to house his new stock, the enthusiastic rancher had erected new buildings. In order to pay for them, he had borrowed.

Alas for the vanity of human wishes! (As Samuel Johnson, Ll.D. (Oxon.) called it.) Alas for ambition!

The Federal Government, in the name of Economy, had canceled the flood control project for the area including the Little Comanche, Big Comanche, Middle Comanche, Muddy Tom, Clear Tom and Bullhead riverine regions — thus leaving "Big Jimmy" Dandy of the Jim Dandy Earthworm Ranch holding, as it were, the bag.

What right (he demanded) had the Federal Government to come messing things up in Texas with Economy? If Texans had wanted Economy (he declared) they'd have stayed a Republic.

"And so here I am," he asseverated, "with fifteen million worms in my pits, and my regular markets can't take no more than a million of 'm. 'Doc,' you see before you a ruined man. My hopes are blasted, my lands are mortgaged and it looks as if 'Little Jimmy' and Mary Jane won't be able to get married for years and years, because I just know my boy wouldn't break his daddy's heart by taking on the responsibility and expense of a wife before his daddy's debts were paid off down to the last copper

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penny. I'd blow my brains out if I thought otherwise, and he knows it; yes, he does.

"Just the thought of all them hungry beauties crawling and wigling in my worm pits, and no market a-tall for'm, makes me feel raw and miserable in the pit of my stomach. I wonder if Miz Doothit baked any sweet potato pie lately. Though I'll take rhubarb-pecan if she hasn't."

Doctor Morris Goldpepper declined an invitation to join the rancher in the kitchen, and, on the terminologically inexact plea of a headache, withdrew to take another long walk in the country.

WITH one part of his mind Dr. Goldpepper mused upon the problem of the Goldpepper Cap, for so many long years his perpetual Work In Progress — should it be, for example, reticulated or non-reticulated? — while simultaneously with another part of his mind he brooded over the question of "Big Jimmy," "Little Jimmy" and Mary Jane.

Almost before he realized it he found himself upon a sort of a high mound or hillock, from whence he had a view of much of the property belonging to his friend Dr. Crawford. Everywhere the green verdure grew — except on the hillock, which was dusty and arid and nourished (if that is not too strong a word) only a handful of sickly and economically valueless weeds.

A scrabbling sort of noise caught his attention, and he turned to observe the identical alien from Upsilon Centauri who had earlier been ejected from the property, in the current act of kneeling and pouring handfuls of dust on his head with both hands.

"Abject I am, Great Goldpepper," he wined. "Abasing myself before you in humility I am. On behalf of my people apology offering, I am. Forgive, forgive, Compassionate Goldpepper!"

At first Doctor Morris Goldpepper resolved to sell his life dearly. But the thought occurred to him that this creature from another galactic quadrant might just conceivably be telling the truth. Furthermore, his curiosity was piqued.

"What are you doing here?" he inquired. "On the terms of the peace treaty signed between your planet, the American Dental Association and the Waterfront Workers Union (acting through their representative, Mr. Albert Annapollo, and the Longshoremen's Dental Health Plan — who acted as our shock troops — I was to be released from the captivity wherein I toiled making false teeth to enable your naturally toothless race to pose as Earthmen; and those of you on this planet were to leave *instanta,*

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on pain of having your planet's water fluoridated without mercy! Therefore I must beg to inquire what you think you are doing here?"

"The slightest trace of fluorine to us instant death is, Life-loving Goldpepper," the alien sniveled. "Have ruth!"

Touched despite himself, Dr. Goldpepper magnanimously directed him to speak without fear. This the non-terrestrian lifeform (his race had two hearts, and six distinct and articulate digits on each hand and foot) proceeded to do.

"Since you from us taken were, great calamity upon us has come, Auspicious Goldpepper," he moaned. "Assist, assist!"

"What seems to be the trouble?"

"Overpopulation."

Somewhat stiffly, Dr. Goldpepper pointed out that he was not Margaret Sanger.

"Malnutrition! The soil of our home world for cycles, sickening has been. Woe, woe, woe! Our stricken planet aid, Scientific Goldpepper!"

In a *précis*, or nutshell, the story he told was that, as a result of some curious condition of their planet's soil itself, the slith crop, source of their staple gelatinous food, had failed by forty per cent, and was still failing. Purts, the prime source of gruel, had dropped to a mere twenty per cent of normal; and as for sneet, kutch and zooky, the nutritive elements of which were scantier, it was doubtful if the crops would reach maturity. The soil chemists of Upsilon Centauri, who were as advanced, probably, as our own, had pronounced themselves baffled. Large areas had been sprayed with Kz. Pf. Kz. to no avail, and larger ones irrigated with snurg without the slightest results.

"Once our whole planet like *that* looked," the spokesman wailed. "Now, like *this* it is." He gestured from the greenery on all sides to the sterility of the hill, or undulation, on which they stood; and he stooped to cast more dust on his head.

As Doctor Goldpepper followed his gestures, he observed one of the ranch-hands coming their way, and indicated, by waving his hand, that he desired this man to come up.

" 'Doc,' seens you're here," the man said, coming up to him, "I got thishyere tush that's been givin me Hell, my face is all swoll up, and I been livin mostly on beans an beer. See?" And he obtruded a dusty finger into his mouth to indicate the offending canine.

"Come to the ranch-house when you can, where I have my instruments, and I'll take a look at it," said Dr. Goldpepper. "Meanwhile,

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if you will pardon my curiosity, why is this particular hill so desolate, compared to what I might call the lushness of the rest of the ranch?"

The man withdrew his finger, sucked meditatively on the tooth and then said, "Why, how the land looks hyere, that's how *all* thishyear land use ta look, twell we got in them Jim Dandy Giant Golden-Red Hybrids. Now, evva othuh bit a land hyere is green an growin. We keeps thishyear little old hill seprut just fer showin whut it oe'ul use ta look like; will it hurt much, 'Doc?' "

And in this wise was Dr. Morris Goldpepper reminded of the singular and curious ability of the common earthworm — let alone the Jim Dandy Giant Golden-Red Hybrid earthworm — to rejuvenate a piece of ground by moving through it, and by moving *it* through *them*. "Disgusting subject," some might say, but to Dental Science nothing natural is disgusting; thus cogitating, he returned to the ranch-house, followed by the Upsilon Centaurian, just in time to catch "Big Jimmy."

AMERICA'S leading worm rancher was loath to believe that the alien was from another planet, but, upon being assured and reassured that he was not, at any rate, from the Soviet Union, he professed his complete willingness to do business. After all, it is not every day in the week that one finds a customer for fifteen million earthworms.

However, the term "customer" implies not only sale, but purchase as well. Purchase may be by cash, goods or service. Cash, it was obvious, the Upsilonians did not have. The only service of which they were possessed which was at all likely to be of use was that of teleportation (matterporting, according to another usage); and it was agreed that this was something for which the world was not yet prepared. Which left "goods."

The Upsilonian offered, when the crops of his native world should be restored to their former yield, to pay for the worms, pound for pound, in slith, purts, sneet, kutch and/or zooky. But on being informed by Doctor Morris Goldpepper (who had lived on these substances and their derivatives for months) that the best of them tasted like old library paste, Mr. Dandy declined. He also eructated.

"Pardon me, folks," he said, abashed and discomfited. "It's a sort of nervous indigestion, which I get every now and. . . . What in thee Hell are *these?*"

"These" were a number of objects in a small box offered by the alien Upsilonian, apparently the same bulk as a five-grain as-

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pirin tablet, but shaped rather like tiny pretzels.

"Minor medications of my planet, they are," he said. "For ailments of stomach, colon, freest and grunk, good they are. Take, take, Worm-Raising Dandy."

He took, and while he was swallowing, Doctor Crawford asked, "They good for anything else?"

The Upsilonian reflected. "Arthritis," he said, after cogitating thoughtfully. Doctor "Clem" avowed himself an irregular victim to what he thought might be arthritis, in his left knee, and swallowed one of the pillular pretzels before his colleague could point out to him that this was all a highly non-scientific approach to a highly scientific problem.

It was at this point that "Little Jimmy" came in and reminded his father that they had fifteen million worms to take care of and hence for that reason couldn't stay there all day and all night, much as he ("Little Jimmy") would personally prefer to do. The muffled sound of Mary Jane sobbing outside was audibly heard when he paused, reluctantly.

His father rose. "Boy's right," he posited. "Well, I guess I'll have to come back tomorrow and continue the discussion. I sure do hope we can think of something. Bye." And they drove off in the palomino Cadillac, and then Doctor Goldpepper had to treat the ranch-hand with the infected tooth. It was a root-canal job, but, with the able if reluctant assistance of his colleague, was successfully accomplished.

Everyone retired to bed rather early, including the Upsilonian. "I believe I'll take another one of those doo-hickeys," the host observed, as he prepared to go upstairs.

"Has your arthritis been bothering you?" Dr. Goldpepper inquired solicitously.

"No; but why take chances?" was the rejoinder. "Night, 'Morry.' Night, Mary Jane. Night, um."

Mary Jane sniffled.

THE NEXT morning found Doctor Morris Goldpepper sipping his pink grapefruit juice (for which fruit Texas should be more famous than it is) with only Mary Jane for company; and she had nothing to say except an occasional semi-stifled sob.

Before he had finished the job, the Dandys drove up, Mr. Dandy, Senior, bounding into the breakfast-nook (it was as big as the Grand Ballroom at the Hotel Davenport) with his red face full of beaming joy. "It worked!" he cried — a noise which produced the Upsilonian on the scene. "Big Jimmy" picked him from his feet and danced around the room with

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him. "It worked! Settled my stomach like it never was settled before! It's just *got* to be good for arthritis, too! I figure half the population of the *U*nited States has got nervous stomachs, and the other half has arthritis! Mr. Upsilonian (say, are you Armenian? I've known some real fine Armenians!), I'll take seven and a half million white ones, and seven and a half million pink ones, a worm for a pill. A deal?"

The alien was too startled to do more than nod.

Dr. Crawford came down at that moment. "Mary Jane, honey," he observed, "you trot right out and give your sweetheart a real big good-morning kiss, hear? And tell him that the wedding is *on*!"

The delighted girl rushed, squealing merrily, from the room, and her father, in a lowered tone of voice, winked and dug the other Earthmen in the ribs with his elbows, as he observed, "I found something *else* that those pills are good for! Why, good *morning*, Lilybelle!"

Doctor Goldpepper, on the point of asking *what* else, looked up to see who "Lilybelle" might be, and lo and behold, it was no other one but the comely housekeeper, whom he had never heard "Clem" address other than as "Mrs. Doothit, ma'am," before. She blushed, and her eyes, before she cast them down, sparkled.

"Hmm," observed "Big Jimmy," adding, "Well I guess now we know what 'freest' means. Or maybe it's 'grunk.' Tell them factories to start gearing for increased production! Yip-pay!"

"Ee-yih-hoo!" cried Doctor Crawford.

The alien said nothing, but genuflected and kissed the cuffs of Doctor Goldpepper's trousers.

How Upsilon Centauri was saved from soil sickness and famine, how the Jim Dandy Ethical Drug Company of Texas, Inc., moved with the speed of light into the ranks of the great corporations along with its sister-syndicate, the Jim Dandy Giant Golden-Red Hybrid Earthworm Company; how James E. (for Elphonsus) Dandy, Jr., married Mary Jane Crawford at the same double ceremony which united her father in matrimony to Mrs. Lilybelle Doothit, are matters too profuse in content to be recorded here by Doctor Morris Goldpepper, now restored once again to health and duty; who, desiring only the good and welfare of the American Dental profession and the human race, is glad to go down to posterity merely as the inventor of the Goldpepper Bridge and the Goldpepper Crown, and perfector of the Semi-Retractable Clasp which bears his name.

— AVRAM DAVIDSON

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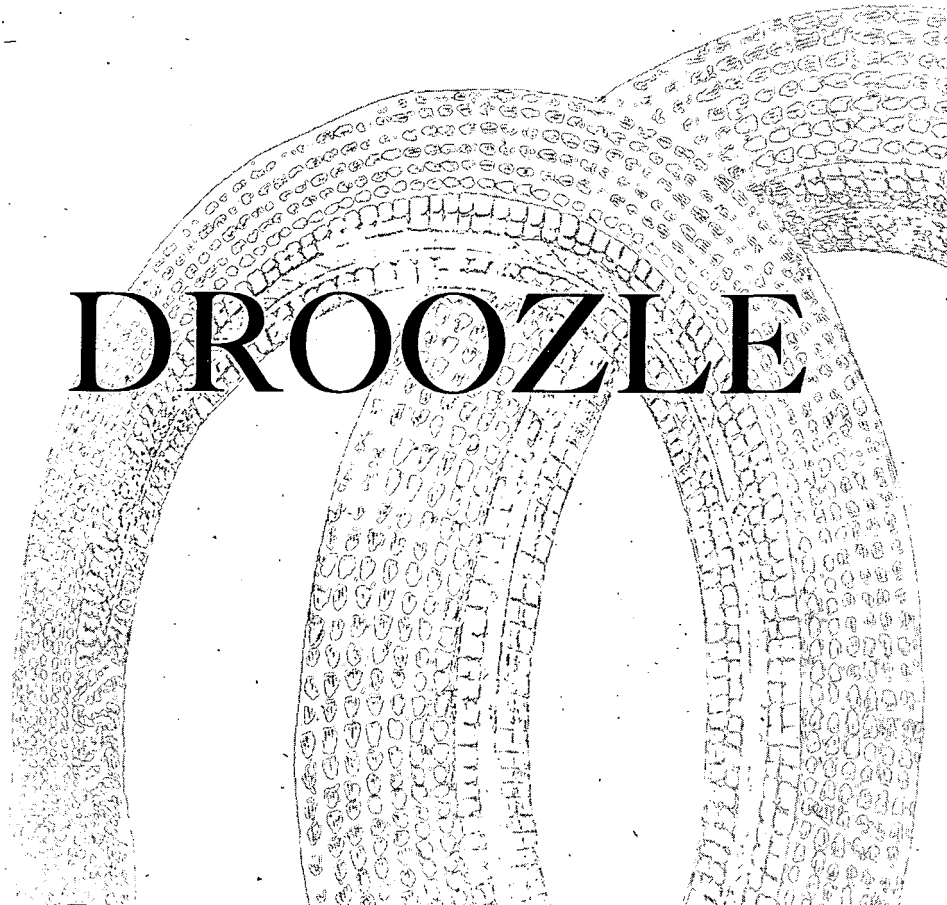
DROOZLE



JEAN LANNI could see that his girl friend, Judy Stokes, thought it was the lamest excuse she had ever heard. If your ball-point pen won't write as you want it to, your life doesn't stop, she probably was thinking. You just get yourself another pen—You don't call off a marriage . . .

Skeptically the girl with the long, golden red hair pointed at his breast pocket. "This Droozle I must see. And who's that other member of the partnership there beside him? An Eversharp pencil named Blackie?"

"No, that is the other end of Droozle. Permit me to introduce you." Blandly the tall, young artist slid Droozle from his breast

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Droozle was probably the greatest writer in the world — any world!

By FRANK BANTA

pocket, straightened him from his U-shape and handed his twelve-inch pen to her.

"A snake!" she shrieked.

"What else?"

"Why, I thought those ruby eyes were jewels! I must have squeezed right up against him when I kissed you," she cried indignantly.

"You did. I felt him squirm a little."

"Oh! And here I thought it was your heart beating wildly."

"Well, maybe it was. It does that sometimes."

"Let's try again. And this time hold your snake behind you." The long-legged girl stood on tiptoe to reach him.

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"It *was* your heart beating wildly," she decided a moment later. "Which makes me think you might not just be trying to get rid of me by a silly excuse."

"Believe me, I'm not," he urged. "Droozle is the key to all my fortunes."

"All right, tell me about it. But first tell me where in the universe you got him."

"Oh, that was just after I graduated from art school. I was on my grand tour. We had an unexpected stopover at the Coffin planetary system. I discovered ballpoint snakes are the chief export of Coffin Two. When we lifted ship, I had acquired my little puppy snake, Droozle."

"Is a puppy snake like a puppy dog?" she asked, fascinated. "I mean, do they have their little domestic troubles, such as the calls of nature?"

"Oh, he was thoroughly pocket-broken before I acquired him. But he did like his little jokes, and I learned to leave him curled up in a circular ashtray until maturity sobered him."

"WELL, I should say! You drew sketches with him, didn't you tell me?"

He nodded. "At first he only had one color of ink—red—and if I sketched with him all day he would commence to look wretchedly anemic. He took two days to refill, normally. But I could use him again in only one day's time provided I didn't mind the top three-fourths of my pen laying on my arm."

"I hope his weight didn't get tiresome," she commiserated, holding in her amusement.

"I coped somehow," he answered sturdily. "Later he learned — after I squeezed him on the liver a few times just to show him how — to switch to a lovely shade of ochre, which was delightful on pale green or pink paper. Why, what's the matter, Judy?"

"Go on," she choked. "Go go go!"

He beamed. "I write my letters with him too. Every day I wrote with him, first in red, and then in ochre to give him a rest. He seemed to love to write more than to sketch. He would jump into my hand with tail happily pointed downward as I sat down to my writing desk. And when I later saw his dark green stripes turning pastel and knew that anemia was imminent, and started to lay him down for a earned rest, he would stiffen himself as if to say, 'Oh, come, come! I'm good for half a page yet!'"

"It sounds as though he was a willing worker, but I still can't see why his malfunction makes our marriage impossible."

"I haven't gotten to his career

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as a novelist yet. There lies the heart of the tragedy."

"Please proceed to the heart of the tragedy."

"IT all began when I found him arched up one morning, writing by himself—with difficulty, it is true. His first message to the world was, *'I hold that the supine viewpoint is seldom downward!'*"

"I don't see how he could stand up on end to write for very long, even with such a magnificent philosophy to bolster him."

"What a terrible pun," Jean groaned. "He couldn't stand up very long at first. But I saw he had talent. I gladly learned the skill of holding him upright in a relaxed manner so that he could express himself on paper. In no time at all, he had written what was to be his first, sensational, best-selling shocker, *Naked Bellies in the Grass.*"

"That does sound sensational."

"Not for snakes. He neglected to mention his characters were snakes. *I Fang You Very Much* followed swiftly afterward and was just as successful. Mothers were amused with its lispy title and got it for the children."

"Sounds like a story with some meat in it."

"Yes! Something you can get your teeth into. However, his next offering, *A Snake Pit Full of Love,* was by far the topper. It was banned in Boston."

"You haven't mentioned anything tragic so far," she observed. "In fact, you have made a pot of money."

"Right. After my snake had filed his income tax returns, we still had enough money to purchase this house and to support us for a couple of years. The only trouble is, his royalties have stopped coming in and that money is all used up. I still haven't been able to sell any of my landscape paintings. So we haven't any income, and that's why you and I can't marry for a long time yet—if ever!"

Her exquisite brows wrinkled with concentration. "I don't understand. Has Droozle written himself out?"

"Far from it," answered Jean, seating himself and parking Droozle on his knee. "He's writing more than ever."

"The quality is gone, then?"

Jean shook his head. "No, he's writing superlatively."

"Then what *is* the problem?" she asked, now thoroughly mystified.

"He's writing classics!" burst out Jean in baffled irritation. "He won't write anything else! Easily seeing the approaching catastrophe, I wrote long persuading essays to him. It was pathetically useless. Proudly he continued to

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write his *Rise and Fall of the Western Plainsman* in a lucid, passionate prose which would evoke an imperishable picture — but in three thousand pages."

"I think classics are *nice*," protested Judy, "and one of these days I'm going to read another one."

Huskily Jean told her the worst. "Writing classics consumes paper by the ton. And if you ever get your 750,000 word story finished, you must then start shrinking it back to an acceptable 75,000 words. This is a nearly hopeless task. Of course if you can get it back to 75,000 words the digest magazines will have no trouble shrinking it to 15,000 words or fifteen pictures, and you then get your fingers in the till." He paused and all hope fled from his face. "Droozle won't live nearly long enough to get all of that shrinking done. And in the meantime that scribbling snake is writing me out of house and home!"

"Are you going to let him get away with it?" the girl challenged.

"I DON'T know whether I am or not," replied the young artist, looking worried. "I thought I had the problem solved at first. He got so sassy when we were arguing about him writing classics that I had no hesitation about applying a pinch of glue to his glittering little extremity. That put him out of the writing business until he came to terms."

"Well, now. You *were* enterprising!" she approved.

"It didn't do any good though," Jean grumbled despondently, bowing his head.

"He wouldn't bargain?" she asked incredulously.

"He didn't have to. He knew right where the cheese grater was."

"Ooh!"

"My sentiments exactly. But I don't know what to do with him now."

"You're all out of ideas?"

"Oh we could sell this house and move down to skid row where the rents are cheap," he flung out airily, but quite plainly worried sick.

"I've got a much better idea than that," she said cheerily, getting a pad and pencil from her red handbag. "How about giving Droozle this ultimatum?" As she wrote, Jean read over her shoulder, " 'Suggest you begin writing fiction pleasing both to you and your master, or we shall be forced to hand you over to the dog catcher!' "

Jean drew back amazed. "Why, we would do no such thing!"

"I know it, silly. I'm just negotiating."

"No," he grumped, ready to be angry with her. He got up and

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strode around the studio. "The dog catcher! We will not lie to that snake!"

Judy dropped the idea. "I've just now thought of another one. Here's an ultimatum we could give him and mean it, too. No more writing until we reach an agreement, or we will take away all his writing paper and reading matter for good!"

"I'd thought of doing that," Jean conceded. "But isn't that a monstrous way to treat a literary genius?"

"Not at all!" she protested. "By taking on a work that will require more time than his lifetime, he is defeating himself."

"There's that way of looking at it," agreed the artist. "All right, Droozle," he called. "You heard us talking and you know we mean it. No more writing until we reach an agreement—or else!"

Droozle quit writing at once. While the girl and the young artist watched anxiously, Droozle first wandered about uncertainly for a few minutes and then curled up on a newspaper and went to sleep.

He slept all evening.

"HE has beaten us again," Jean Lanni told Judy Stokes resignedly when she arrived at his studio the following evening. He watched Droozle fascinatedly as the snake moved his restless tail over the margins of newspapers spread on the floor. "He doesn't know yet that I know. I discovered the fraud only by the merest accident."

"He isn't writing?" she asked, perusing the newspapers for signs of Droozle's elegant script.

"He most certainly is."

"Where?"

"Look at him!" Jean exclaimed, ignoring her question. "He's doing it again!"

Droozle had ceased wriggling for the moment and lay there shaking violently, as though he had malaria. Then the paroxysm passed and he took up his restless movements again.

"The poor genius," mourned Judy. "He must be sick with frustration."

"Sick, my eye! That snake has learned to centrifuge part of his blood while it is in his body, so that the hemoglobin is separated out. The result is—invisible ink!"

"Why, I'll tell that Droozle off!" raved Judy. "Here I sat feeling sorry for the little crumb!"

Droozle did not mind. While she ranted, he brazenly began writing in visible ink once more.

"How did you catch him at it?" she asked.

"I used a piece of his newspaper to pick up a hot saw blade. The heat turned the invisible ink brown."

"Droozle," said the girl passion-

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ately, looking down at the writer, "you know your master is in great need of funds. *Where* is your sense of loyalty and self-sacrifice for the one who has cared for you?"

Droozle wrote poetically, "Is there Joy or any other good thing in Abnegation? Is there Beauty in Sacrifice? What Handsome purpose do these serve a being in his race with Time? His Days will soon be spent and they will come no more; thus my Criterion: Is This the most Joy gathering, Awareness touching, Beauty sensing act of which he is capable? None other is worthy of his time!"

"Men are not so selfish," objected Jean.

"I am not a man," wrote Droozle simply.

Jean turned staunchly to the girl. "Judy, he has convinced me. I have been wrong about him. From now on *he can write whatever he likes!*"

"Good-by to our hopes then?"

"For the present, yes" assented Jean stoically, as he brought fresh sheets of paper from his desk for Droozle. "My landscapes might begin to sell after a while," he added without conviction.

"Rotten little crumb," Judy fumed, glaring balefully at the snake. But Droozle wrote serenely on, his ruby eyes glowing enigmatically.

Jean interposed magnanimously, "I see now that I have been inexcusably selfish with Droozle. I've kept him cooped up here, not wanting to bother with him while I was out on my painting trips. True, he was busy writing. But most of his knowledge of Earth has come from books; he can't write classics about living things unless he *sees* living things."

AS she picked up his trend of thought, Judy's face lost its resentful expression, and something like seraphic righteousness spread over it. "I see what you mean. Just how did you plan to make up for this shut-in feeling that poor Droozle must have been suffering so much from for all these years?"

"Oh, Judy, I'm so glad you asked me!" He threw wide his arms to the world. "*Out* into the wind and the rain we shall go, and there I will draw my pictures while he observes; then *into* the roaring, brawling taverns we shall go, where life thrives in all its abundance. I've been robbing him by shutting him up here."

"Jean, look at Droozle," the girl exclaimed, pointing. "He has stopped in the middle of a page and is starting on a fresh one."

Droozle wrote, "Please not out into the wind and the rain. Please not into the roaring, brawling taverns where life thrives in all its abundance. I *loathe* shudder and tilt."

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"Loathing is no reason to turn away from reality, Droozle," admonished the artist. "Things are not nearly so bad as they used to be anyway. In all justice, shudder and tilt requires far less body-English than its ancestor, rock and roll."

Droozle argued carefully, "You will recall I heard some of it once when you took me into a particularly dirty bar over in the west end of town. I feel, as a result, that I have observed this type of data to the extent that I can write of it competently without further study."

"Oh, but that was months ago," enthused Jean. "The tunes have all changed by now. New pows appear on the tapes every week. You have missed countless sock-eroos already, being cooped up here. You will bless me, once you get accustomed to the realities of life — see if you don't. Heigh-ho the wind and the rain!"

The snake shuddered.

"Careful, you'll centrifuge," Judy warned.

Jean added reflectively, studying the ceiling, "Day by day, month by month, year by year, the reality of everyday existence etches deeply into our consciousness, if we will but have the fortitude to expose ourselves to it."

Droozle unavoidably centrifuged this time, but did manage, with laborious lateral movements, to mix the hemoglobin back with the plasma again.

He complained, "It is cruel of you to condemn me to this ugliness. I want only to read my books and hear a few simple fugues by Bach."

"It is not cruel. You will have exactly the same existence I have chosen for myself as an artist. It is fundamental that if you are to write serious literature, you must rub your nose against the realities of life."

Droozle wriggled unhappily for a moment. Finally he wrote, "Actually my writing may not be as serious as the title implies. Misunderstandings conceivably arise over titles. Instead of *The Rise and Fall of the Western Plainsman,* how about changing it to *Those Lowdown Scaly Rustlers?*"

"That's really getting down to earth," cried Jean, concealing his elation. "But if you aren't going to write serious literature, who will I get to go on my painting trips with me?"

"Take that female of yours," suggested Droozle. "If she refuses to go, inform her that we shall be forced to hand her over to the dog catcher."

"Do you suppose he means that?" wondered Jean.

"Of course not, silly," said Judy, bright-eyed. "He's only negotiating."

— FRANK BANTA

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Pluto has always been a puzzle to astronomers — and here is one answer!

PLUTO
DOORWAY TO THE STARS

By GEORGE PETERSON FIELD

PLUTO, the outermost planet of the solar system, was named after that dark, mysterious stranger, the Greek god of hell. The name is apt, for this dark, mysterious planet has had the astronomers living in their own private purgatory ever since its existence was first deduced.

The astronomers have been able to obtain a few facts about the planet, but what is frustrating them is that by using these hard-won facts they can easily prove that such a planet cannot exist! But, despite all their theories, that baleful yellowish speck of light continues to glare down the telescope at them as if to say, "Wrong! Guess again."

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It all started back in the 1820's when it was found that Uranus was not following a smooth elliptical orbit, but was staggering through the sky like a drunk. It was finally guessed that the erratic behavior was due to another planet still further out. Two mathematicians tackled the problem and independently calculated the orbit, position and mass of the hypothetical planet. With the position in the sky known, it was a simple matter for the astronomers to find the new planet, Neptune, which till then had been overlooked. As soon as Neptune was discovered, the orbit of Uranus was recalculated and this time the observations fitted perfectly — almost. There were still small differences between the predicted and the actual positions.

Spurred by the success of the previous work, Professor Percival Lowell thought that there might be another planet still further out. He calculated that it should be four thousand million miles out from the sun, moving in an unusually elliptic orbit with a period of 280 years, and it should have a mass six times that of the earth. The same figures were later obtained by another prominent astronomer, Professor W. H. Pickering.

An object this large should be easy to find, so in 1905, Professor Lowell sat down at his moderate sized, but adequate, telescope and started looking. He died without finding it. It was there, but it was much fainter than it had a right to be and he had missed it. The astronomers' private purgatory had started. Later searches with photographic plates also missed it, although it was photographed twice. Once it was masked by a bright star, and the other time the image fell on a flaw in the negative!

IT wasn't until 1930 that Pluto was found. The radius, eccentricity and period of the orbit were almost exactly as Lowell had predicted. Because the orbital calculations were so closely verified, there was no reason to doubt Lowell's prediction that Pluto had a mass of six times the earth's mass, except that the size of the planet was impossibly small. It was so small that it still looked like a point through the telescope. It wasn't until 1950, using the 200-inch Palomar telescope, that Pluto's diameter was measured. It was roughly 3600 miles, or about as big as Mercury. This would make the density of the planet hundreds of times greater than water! The earth is only 5.5 times denser than water and osmium, the densest known material, is only 22 times denser. Thus Pluto seems to be made of

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collapsed matter, except such matter should only be stable in the interior of dwarf stars. Such a planet should not exist.

But it does!

The astronomers have tried everything in an attempt to make sense out of what they know, including fudging the numbers a little. There have been suggestions that Pluto is a very smooth sphere covered by large methane oceans, and the small observed diameter may be due to specular reflection. (There was a similar effect present with the Echo ballon.) But there are slow variations in the intensity, indicating that Pluto is rotating with a day of 154 hours, and one would expect rather sudden changes in intensity from the specular reflections. The other unusual thing about Pluto is its orbit. The orbit is so egg-shaped that it actually passes inside the orbit of Neptune, so that they would at various times in the past and future pass very close to each other. The astronomers feel that, due to perturbations from the other planets, it is improbable that Pluto has been in its present orbit for more than 200 million years. This is only a small fraction of the age of the solar system; so apparently Pluto is a stranger which arrived in its present orbit from other regions of space.

There is one other nagging feature and that is the breakdown of Bode's Law for Neptune and Pluto. Bode's Law is an empirical formula for the orbits of the planets and the reason for its acceptance is best shown by the following table:

	Radius Using Bode's Law	Actual Orbital Radius In A. U.
Mercury	0.4	0.387
Venus	0.7	0.723
Earth	1.0	1.0
Mars	1.6	1.524
Asteroids	2.8	2.8
Jupiter	5.2	5.2
Saturn	10.0	9.54
Uranus	19.6	19.2
Neptune	—	30.0
Pluto	38.8	39.5

(Note: Bode's Law does not predict a planet in Neptune's orbit.)

There is obviously something wrong out past Uranus. It is as if Pluto had come along, interacted with Neptune and pushed it into an inner orbit, usurping its proper place in Bode's Law.

A very weird planet indeed. What we actually know about Pluto is very little. But this little bit that we know points out that it may be very profitable to learn more about it. In the coming decades, as the Orbiting Astronomical Observatory is put into operation and man ventures to the outer planets, we will get to

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know it better. But until then it is interesting to speculate.

ONE of the most spectacular possible solutions to the mystery is to assume that it really is a visitor from outside the solar system. Not just a wandering frozen planet that happened to be collected by the sun long ago in its wanderings through space, but a device, a "gravity catapult" made by intelligent beings and placed in orbit around the sun . . . a "gravity catapult" being a generator of gravitational fields that is used to accelerate spaceships to velocities near the speed of light.

It has only been recently realized that such a "gravity catapult" could exist. We can describe how it should be made, but we couldn't even begin to construct it with our present technology.

It has long been known that Einstein's theory of gravity predicts many unusual properties of gravitation. These effects are not well known since they are unobservable with our presently available instruments. So there was little reason to talk about them. The most interesting effect is that a rotating mass, such as a planet, not only attracts an object toward it with its regular gravitational field, but it also "drags" the object around it in the same direction as its rotation. Thus a spaceship in orbit near the earth is helped along in its orbit by the earth's rotation. In order to have any appreciable dragging effect on a space ship, a rotating planet has to be very heavy, and rotating rapidly; also the spaceship should be as close as possible to the planet's center. This calls for planets with high density, since they have all their mass concentrated in a small radius and the spaceship can get close to the center without hitting the surface.

Using these ideas of Einstein, we can envision how such a gravitational catapult could be made. It would require a large, very dense body with a mass larger than the earth, made of collapsed matter many times heavier than water. It would have to be whirling in space like a gigantic, fat smoke ring, constantly turning from inside out.

The forces it would exert on a nearby object, such as a spaceship, would tend to drag the ship around to one side, where it would be pulled right through the center of the ring under terrific acceleration and expelled from the other side. If the acceleration were of the order of 1000 g's, then after the minute or so that it would take to pass through, the velocity of the ship on the other side would be near

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that of light. The amazing thing is that because these are gravitational forces, a person in the space ship would feel nothing. He would actually be in free fall all the time! This is because gravitational forces act independently on each atom of the body at the same time and give each atom the same acceleration. Because there are no differences in motion of different parts of the body, there is no feeling of weight.

A network of these devices in orbit around interesting stars would allow an advanced race to have an energetically economical method of space travel. Because, even though the ring would whirl a little slower after the spaceship had taken away some of its energy, it would gain that energy back when it decelerated an incoming ship. There, of course, would be no way to aim such a massive object, so to make sure that it can be used for more than one direction, it would be set to cartwheeling slowly (say with a 154 hour period?) so as to cover all parts of the sky.

Such a device could even be made elsewhere by some unimaginable technology and shot through space by a much larger device. It could halt itself by pushing against a massive planet (such as Neptune?).

Maybe when we get to Pluto, we will find a small artificial satellite around it. Inside will be a message from the Galactic Federation welcoming us to its membership now that we had interplanetary flight, and presenting us with the gravity catapult for our use until we know enough to make one ourselves — a sort of "coming out" present!

— **GEORGE PETERSON FIELD**

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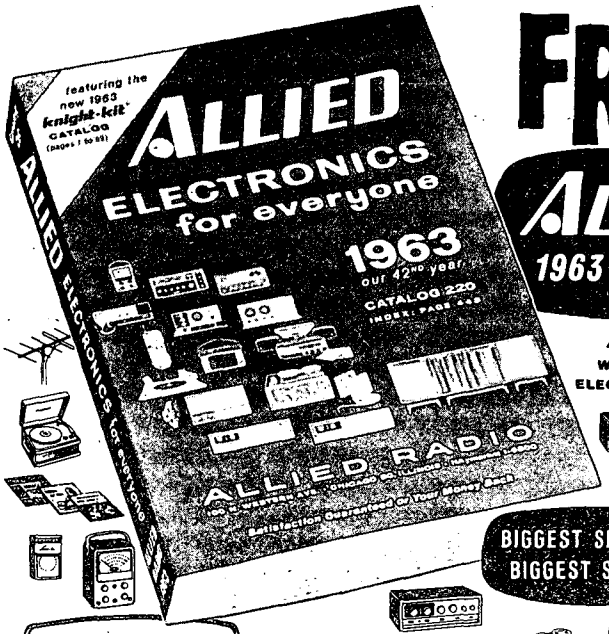

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GENERAL MAX SHORTER

To spread Mankind to the stars carries a high cost in lives — and not all of them are human!

By KRIS NEVILLE

Illustrated by GIUNTA

MIRACASTLE: The initial landing had been made on a flat plateau among steep, foreboding mountains which seemed to float through briefly cleared air. In the distance a sharp rock formation stood revealed like an etching: a castle of iron-gray stone whose form had been carved by alien winds and eroded by acid tears from acid clouds.

Far above was a halo where the sun should be. The sun was an orange star only slightly larger than Sol and as near to Miracastle as Sol to Earth. The orange rays splintered against the fog and gloom was perpetually

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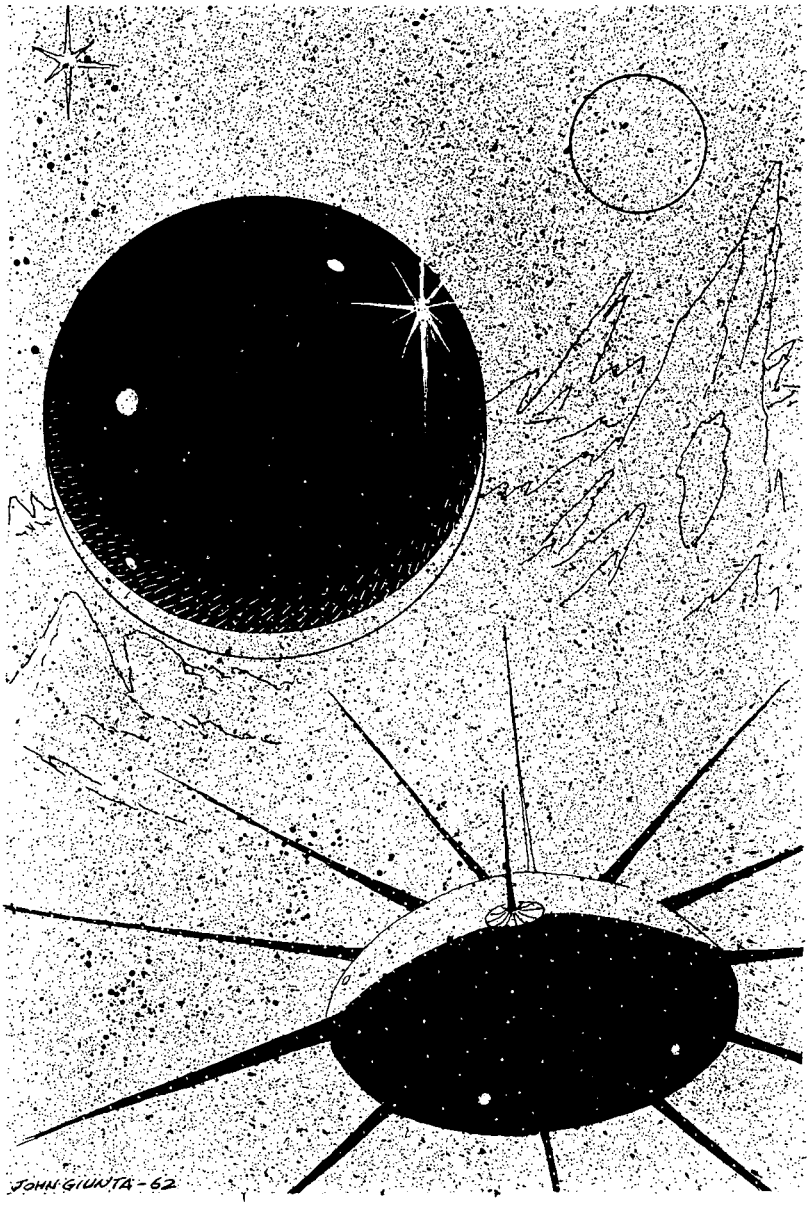

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upon the dark face of existence.

This was the first two-stage planet man had ever attempted to colonize. Miracastle was so far from Earth that the long ships were destroyed twice to reach it.

THE technicians came, commanded by General Max Shorter, sixty-three years old. Men wearing the circle whose diameter was etched in ruby steel enclosing a background of gleaming ebon — the emblem was a silver D over a sunburst of hammered gold.

The surface of Miracastle roiled with unfamiliar storms and tornados and hurricanes. Before these, the films of lichen evaporated into dust, and the sparse and stunted vegetation with ochre foliage turned sear and was powdered by the fury in the air.

Earth equipment, alien to the orange sun, hammered into the heart of Miracastle. Night and day it converted the pulverized substance of the planet in the white-hot core of its atomic furnaces.

Acid rivers snapped at the wind and changed to salt deposits and super-heated steam. In the gaseous atmosphere, neutral crystals formed and fell like powdered rain. Miracastle heated and cooled and shivered with the virus of man-made chemical reactions, and the storms screamed and tore at the age-old mountains.

Inside the eternal, self-renewing Richardson domes, the technicians worked and waited and superintended the computers which controlled the processes raging beyond them.

The long ship lifted steadily and majestically through the battering storm and the driving rain of dust and crystals. Out beyond the dense space that surrounds all stars, the long ship probed the ever-shifting currents in the four-dimensional universe. The long ship found a low-density flaw, where space could hardly be said to exist at all. The long ship, described mathematically, was half as long as the continuum — the length being inversely proportional and related only to mass. Time was but a moth's wing between twin cliffs of eternity.

Inside Miracastle's orange sun, at its very core, an atom of hydrogen was destroyed completely; and in the inconceivable distance, an atom of hydrogen appeared. The pulsing, steady-state equation of the universe maintained its knife-edge and inevitable thermo-dynamic balance.

Inside the long ship, a pilot-machine ordered the destruction of a vastly greater collection of matter. The atoms of the ship and the sailors — fixed in rela-

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tionship, each to each—imploded into nothingness.

And the long ship and the men aboard it were born again at a low-density area a million light years away — halfway to Earth. Born and were destroyed again, in the blink of an eye.

Beyond the ship now lay Sol, pulsing in its own warmth and warming its children embedded in the cold and distant texture of the universe. The sailors were ghosts come home.

Miracastle was alone with her conquerors.

GENERAL MAX SHORTER, a few weeks later, began writing a diary.

"I have been Destroyed thirty-seven times during forty years' service with the long ships," he wrote. He wrote with a pen, using a metal straight edge as a line rule.

"I have served faithfully and I believe as well as any man the Corps, the planet and mankind. It is perhaps appropriate at this time, as I approach the end of my long service, to record a few observations which have occurred to me during the course of it as well as to record the day-to-day details of my present command."

The general wrote: "A man is given a job to do. And when all is said and done, that is the most important thing in his life: to do his job."

It took perhaps ten seconds for the soft knock to penetrate his concentration. He adjusted himself to the moment and closed the diary softly. He deposited it in the upper right-hand drawer of the writing desk and locked the drawer.

The knock came again.

He arranged his tie.

"Come in," General Shorter said.

The agitation of the man in the doorway was announced by the paleness of his face.

"Come in, David," General Shorter said, rising politely from the writing desk. "Be seated, please."

"General, we've had a . . . a very unfortunate thing happen on the shift."

The general sank back into his chair. Light from the desk lamp framed his expressionless and immobile face, half in light, half in shadow. He fingered the straight-edge on the desk top.

"Sit down, David, and then tell me about it."

Shift-Captain Arnold moved uncertainly.

"Sit down, sit down," General Shorter repeated impatiently.

Captain Arnold seated himself on the edge of the chair.

"One of the men," he said, "just committed suicide. He was

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in charge of the air changing monitor this shift. He went outside without a suit."

The general blinked as though to remove an irritation from his eye. His hand lay still and hard upon the straight-edge. "What was his name?" he asked in a voice that was vaguely puzzled.

"Schuster. Sergeant Schuster, sir."

"Yes, I remember him," the general said. "He came to us about a week before the lift. I think he was from Colorado. He had very broad shoulders. Short and broad. Neat appearing. Uniform always in good order."

General Shorter ran his thumb and forefinger up the bridge of his nose and then, with a very small sigh, placed his palm over his eyes.

"Draw up the report," he said. "Was there a final message?" The question was uttered without hesitation and was followed by a moment of silence.

"No, sir."

General Shorter's breath was audible.

"Please feel free to smoke, David."

"Thank you, sir, I don't smoke."

"No, of course not. I'd forgotten." General Shorter half turned and placed his hands on the desk. He stood under their pressure. "What would you say to a brandy?"

"I should return to duty, sir."

"A few minutes more," the general said. "The brandy is good." He moved into the shadow and sorted bottles at his tiny cupboard. "Here." He held the glass to the light. Amber liquid flowed softly and the general handed across the half-filled glass. "Sit back," he said. "I'll join you."

Glass in hand, the general stood with his back to the light. He seemed surrounded by cold fire, and the glass sparkled as he lifted it. He sipped. "Try it, it's good."

"It's very good, sir."

FOR a moment neither spoke. Then the general said, "This isn't my first command, you know. I've seen men die. I've had to take chances with them occasionally. You could say, I suppose, that I ordered some men to their deaths. But still, the men came aboard knowing the risks. In the final sense, they, not I, made the decision. I never sent a — "

The sentence ended as the glass slipped and fell. "I'm sorry," he said, looking down at the sparkling fragments at his feet. The dark liquid — the light gave it a reddish cast — puddled and flowed and its aroma filled the room. "No, no. Let it be, David. I'll get it later."

The general went to the cup-

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board and poured into a new glass. Again he was light and shadow. The spilled liquid approached the shadow and was devoured in it as though it had never been, but still the aroma stood on the air.

The general said: "Imagine, if you can, David, that Earth were attacked, and the attack destroyed many of the military installations. After you struck back, David, what would you do next?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm not a strategist, I'm afraid."

"What about your cities? The millions of people trapped without supplies — over-running the countryside, looting, plundering in search of food. Carrying pestilence and disease and terror. What would you do, David?"

"Well, I guess I'd try to organize some relief organization or something."

"But David. Anything you diverted to care for these people would limit your ability to fight back, wouldn't it? They would be cluttering up all your transportation, frustrating effective retaliation. Your second move would be to take the bombs which destroy people and not property and . . . use them on your own cities."

Captain Arnold drained his glass. "That would be . . ." He did not finish.

"Insane, David? No. Rational. Field Commanders must be realists. The job comes first. In this case, the job of defeating the enemy . . . But what does that have to do with us? Nothing, eh? You're right. Sometimes I like to talk, and I suppose that's one of my privileges. I'm not the idealist I used to be, I guess. I remember when I was your age. I saw things differently than I do now. What used to seem important no longer does. Each stage of development has its unique biological imperatives: a child, a youth, a mature man, look out on the world from a body held in focus to different chemistries. But the job remains." General Shorter held up his glass. "Cheers." He drained it.

Again there was silence.

"David, do you think I'm in much trouble?"

"I'm afraid so, General. The Committee is due to arrive tomorrow."

"I know," the general said. "This suicide isn't going to help us. Tomorrow. Is it that soon? I thought . . . yes, I guess it is tomorrow . . . Well, we've been here long enough to lose our immunity, so we'll all catch colds."

Captain Arnold stood. "I better get started on my report."

"Poor Sergeant Schuster," General Shorter said. "If anyone's to blame, it must be me."

"He obeyed the orders."

"What did you say?"

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"I said he obeyed the orders, sir."

"Of course he obeyed the orders," the general said. "What else could he have done?"

II

THE long ship hung in orbit above Miracastle and discharged its passengers. The Scout Ball could handle them: saving energy, which along with time itself, is the ultimate precious commodity of the universe governed by the laws of entropy.

The Scout Ball settled through the dark turbulence undisturbed by the hissing winds. It hovered momentarily in the invisible beacon above the Richardson dome as if both attracted and repelled. It moved horizontally and settled. Suited figures on the surface wrestled with its flexible exit-tube against the storm, fighting to couple it to the lock of the Richardson dome. The exit-tube moved rhythmically until the Scout Ball inched away, drawing it taut. Pumps whirred. The suited figures entered the forward lock of the Scout Ball.

Inside, General Shorter divested himself of the helmet. The suit hung upon him like ancient, wrinkled skin.

He asked, "What time is it?"

Upon being told, he nodded with satisfaction. "Seventeen minutes, total. Good job. Who's in charge?"

"A Mr. Tucker, sir."

"Tucker? Jim Tucker, by any chance?"

"Yes, sir."

General Shorter grunted. "Served with him once. He's probably forgotten . . . That's all right. I'll keep the suit on."

"I don't think they're expecting you with the surface party, General."

"Probably not or they'd be here. Earth crew?"

"They've been out ten months or so, sir."

"We will have colds, then. Would you take me to Mr. Tucker, please?" To the other suited men he said, "Good, fast job."

General Shorter followed the crewman up the spiral staircase and along the corridor. His hand touched a frictionless wall. "New plastic?"

"This is one of the most recent balls, sir."

"How does it handle?"

"Quite well, sir."

"I miss the Model Ten," he said.

"There's only a few left now, I guess."

"I haven't seen one in years."

The crewman stopped before a numberless panel. He knocked politely. "Mr. Tucker? I have General Shorter here. He came out with the surface party."

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Mr. Tucker's voice, the edge of surprise partly lost through the partition, came: "Just a moment."

In silence they waited. General Shorter moved restlessly. Several minutes passed.

The panel opened.

MR. TUCKER was a short, rotund man. His close-cropped hair was graying, although his face was unlined, with the smooth complexion of a child. His irises were gray and gold.

General Shorter stepped forward and introduced himself.

"Come in."

The panel closed.

The two men stood. General Shorter glanced around for a chair.

"Small quarters," Mr. Tucker said. "If you like, sit there. I'll sit on the bed."

They arranged themselves.

"Perhaps you don't remember me?" the general said. "We served together — what, ten years ago? — for about two weeks on Avalon, I believe it was."

"Yes, I thought that was the case. You have a good memory, General."

"Please," the general said, "just call me Max."

Mr. Tucker considered, without committing himself. He proffered a cigar. The general declined.

Mr. Tucker lighted the cigar carefully, moving the flame several times across the blunt end. He regarded the results without expression. "A cigar should be properly lit, General," he said.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so," the general said. He paused to worry at a wrinkle on his suit. "Good trip out?"

"Routine."

"New ship? I notice this is one of the new Balls."

"Mark Six."

"Ah, those. I've always liked the Mark Six. Solid construction. I've been Destroyed maybe half the time in the Mark Sixes. Each one of the Marks has its own personality — I've always thought so. I don't suppose you remember the old Mark Two? That was a long time ago. I've been around. We got lost in one once. It picked a pseudo-fault line and . . . well, never mind. Earth the same, I guess?"

"Hasn't changed."

"I don't know when I'll get back," the general said. The statement seemed to dangle as though it were an unfinished question.

"The new detectors have put Miracastle on the fringe of things."

"I've followed the work," the general said. "I try to keep up. It involves a new concept of mass variation, doesn't it?"

"It just about makes it uneconomical to colonize a two-stage

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planet any more. Or to keep one going."

The general's eyelids flickered. His body moved beneath the wrinkled folds of the surface suit. Cigar smoke curled in the still air.

Mr. Tucker said, "You must have been aware that it would not have been a great loss to have evacuated Miracastle."

The general shuffled in silence. "Yes, sir, I knew the background. It's part of my job to know things like that. You'll find, sir, that I have a strong sense of responsibility. If it's part of my job, I'll know about it."

General Max Shorter abruptly stood and for a moment was motionless, a man deformed and diminished in stature by the ill-fitting surface suit. Expressionless, he looked down, without psychological advantage, at the seated civilian holding the partially smoked cigar.

Later the same day, Mr. Tucker and two of the three other members of the Committee donned surface suits and, together with Captain Meford, the cartographer assigned to Miracastle, they boarded the surface scout.

They arranged themselves in the uncomfortable bucket seats and strapped in.

"Little early for an easy ride," Mr. Tucker commented.

"I've been out before," Captain Meford said laconically. It was his usual manner.

"How long do you think it will take us to get there?"

"Between fifteen and twenty minutes, if I don't hit too much cross wind."

Mr. Ryan, one of the other two civilians, commented, "A long time between cigars, eh, Jim?"

The question was out of place and was ignored without hostility.

Mr. Ryan twisted uncomfortable. At length he said, apologetically, "Dirty, filthy business. I wish it were over with."

"So do I," Mr. Tucker said.

Captain Meford activated the ramp and eased the scout out. It was immediately buffeted by the winds.

"Sorry," he said. "It'll take a minute. Hold tight." The scout moved in three dimensions, erratically. "Wow! Let's set it at about twenty-six inches. Sorry. This will slow us down, but it will ease the bumps on down draft. There. That's better. We're okay now, I think. I guess we can settle back."

Thirty-five minutes later, they came to what was left of the alien city.

BACK in the Richardson dome, General Shorter had coffee, in his quarters, with the remaining man on the Committee, a Mr.

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Flison. They were going through the ritual of conversation.

"This is the first time you've been Destroyed then, sir," the general said. "My first time was so long ago I've forgotten what it feels like."

"I was uneasy in advance," Mr. Flison said. "You read various descriptions about the physical sensations. Intellectually, of course, you draw a distinction, but emotionally you know that the only word which applies is death — pure and simple. But there's no sensation. It happens too fast. You don't even notice it."

Politely attentive, the general had leaned forward. "I don't think it could be put better, he contributed. "That's very apt. You don't even notice it."

Mr. Flison's eyes narrowed in speculation. They maintained the general's own in unwavering focus. He did not acknowledge the compliment.

The general's eyes broke to one side. He moved nervously as though physically to dismiss the tactical error of underestimating his opponent.

"Since this is your first planet," the general said, "perhaps you'd like to see something of the operation? Basically, we have nine Richardson Domes here on Miracastle. Two are the living quarters — the other similar to this. Right now domes Seven and Nine are the more important. They contain the air-changing equipment. We are holding tightly to our completion date, and these two — Seven and Nine — will be pulled out in fifteen days. That is to say, they will, barring any serious interruptions in our work. On schedule, I should point out."

The general poured coffee for himself. Mr. Flison politely declined.

"When you've been in the Corps as long as I have," the general resumed, "the schedule becomes a part of you. Everything —" he held his hands before him, fingers spread, palms facing, and drew them together — "converges on that. It's that simple. Other planets are waiting. In a society as complex as ours, a million — and I mean this literally, sir — a million decisions must be reviewed if the schedule falls behind. Delay of a critical item of equipment can necessitate an unbelievably vast reassignment of personnel and supply patterns. A small cause reverberates throughout the whole fabric of the space technology."

"General Shorter, I think perhaps you're being carried away a little. I'm sure we have adequate procedures to accommodate minor variations in equipment delivery dates. If we don't, the Lord

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help us: we'd have been dead long ago."

The general was in the process of forming an immediate reply, but he reconsidered. When he reached for the coffee, which by now was cool and bitter, his hand was trembling.

The general licked his lips. "More coffee? No? Well, I didn't intend to get off on this. I really wanted to ask if you'd like to inspect our operations." He glanced at his time piece. "I could show you the present shift operation in Dome Nine."

Mr. Flison rose. "No, General, I don't want to be of any bother. I wouldn't want to interfere with your — work."

III

"CITY" is not necessarily descriptive: perhaps less so than the application of Euclidean axioms to advanced geometry. Physically, it was this:

1. Three dozen stone arches whose keystones were inverted bowls.

2. A smooth-walled recess in the sheer face of a cliff.

3. A level lip of rock, as precisely flat as though honed, from which the arches seemed to grow.

"Is this all?" Mr. Tucker asked.

"Yes, sir," Captain Meford said.

Mr. Ryan came to the viewing section. "It looks," he said, "as though the cliff were split down to here and then hewn away to leave the structures there and the apron."

"We found no tools, sir. There were no tools here, nor with them."

"Nothing else at all?"

"They left behind some four hundred chips of stone, apparently numbered. We have them in the dome. And there's a two-line inscription on one of the arches. There's nothing else."

High above the men and the ship, the new wind sang in one of the inverted bowls and fluttered lightly over the inscription. It, like the face of the cliff, was oxidizing. Dust filtered down before the recess, alien symbols falling. Life is the recording angel of time. Without life, all ceases.

"Dust," Mr. Tucker said. "Dust . . . dust . . . more dust. Soon the dust will be over everything. When the wind is gone, it will be there to hold our footprints."

Inside the air-conditioned scout, the men shivered.

"How did you come to find them?" Mr. Ryan asked.

"I saw the constructions from the photos, sir. This had been missed by the mapping party. It's easy enough to see why when you see the pictures."

"This the only one?"

"Yes, sir."

"How can you be sure of that,

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Captain Meford? It's a large planet."

"I had one of the machines scan the remaining maps for geometrical patterns, sir."

"Isn't that done routinely?" Mr. Tucker asked rather sharply.

"Yes, sir. But you see, we've always expected that if we were ever going to encounter intelligent life on a planet, it would be rather widespread. Accordingly—and this is the routine procedure, sir, used, as far as I know, by all contact parties — we ran through a statistically significant sample of the terrain. There was nothing on Miracastle out of the ordinary. There was the typical, low-order vegetable matter, about what we always find. It was a very typical planet, sir."

The third man from the Earth Committee, Mr. Wallace, seldom spoke. When he did, his voice was mild, and there was a sense of child-like wonder in his tone. "The natives?" he asked.

"They . . . had fled when we discovered the city."

"Where did they flee to?" Mr. Wallace asked.

CAPTAIN MEFORD glanced upward. Other eyes followed to end just below the edge of the view screen. Above stood the sheer face of the cliff. Clouds roiled below the summit, obscuring it from view.

"There is a long sloping plateau up there, and a series of natural caves back in the next cliff face," Captain Meford said. This did not seem adequate. He continued: "Most of the air-changing activity starts in the low-lying areas, at first around the dome positions. It advances along an elevation front, gradually drifting up. Little tongues are carried up in advance by the heated currents. The aliens retreated before it. On the plateau you can see the sentries. I guess they posted themselves there, at intervals, between the edge and the new caves, to define the limits of safety. They died there. Six of them. The rest, several hundred, reached the caves. They are dead, too."

"I see," Mr. Wallace said.

"When you first discovered them — ?" Mr. Ryan asked after a moment.

Captain Meford hesitated.

Mr. Tucker said: "I believe one of your men killed himself last night — wasn't it? A technician? I was told he felt you could reverse the air-changing equipment in time to save the aliens. I understand that was very much on his mind for the last week or so."

"I'm not too familiar with the man, sir. He was on Captain Arnold's shift, I believe."

"Captain Meford," Mr. Ryan

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insisted, "when did you say you first discovered the aliens?"

Captain Meford hesitated. The others waited.

"They were then scaling the cliff, sir."

"And General Shorter, was he told of this immediately?" Mr. Ryan asked.

"I don't know when the general was told."

"You discovered them?"

"Yes, sir. I . . . you see, at the time the winds completely prohibited air traffic. As you know, the air scouts are not stable enough until . . . later. Later, I . . . Yes, sir. I discovered them."

"Did you then inform the general?"

"No, sir. I informed the duty officer."

"Did he inform the general?"

"I don't know."

"Why didn't you tell the general?" Mr. Tucker asked.

"I was then in communication with Captain Geiger, and I felt he . . ." The sentence trailed away.

"Would tell the general?" Mr. Tucker prompted. "Well, did he?"

"I believe he did, sir," Captain Meford said. He let out a long breath.

"May we see the aliens?" Mr. Ryan asked.

"I wouldn't advise it, sir," Captain Meford said. "High flights are still very risky because of the wind velocities."

AFTER the evening meal, General Shorter called Captain Arnold aside. "Mind if I go over to Nine with you?" he asked. "The air around here is — well, the fact of the matter is, I'd like to get away from them for awhile."

"Of course not, sir," Captain Arnold said.

"We'll call it an inspection. Which might be a good idea at that. With these people running around trying to interfere with my schedule. Poking around. Asking questions. Taking men away from their work, basically." He tapped his teeth with his right thumb in reflection. "I'd better check up on all the domes tonight, just to be sure."

"Yes, sir."

"I wouldn't want anything to go wrong because they're here."

In the dressing quarters, they donned surface suits and exited through the locks to Miracastle. In the area immediately beyond the Dome, the solidly positioned connection rails radiated away. The general gestured for the captain to lead.

The wind buffeted them. Inside the surface suits it was quiet.

"David?" the general asked.

"Yes, sir?" Captain Arnold said. He was fastening his safety line

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in the keyed slot. He fumbled with it for a moment before the wind.

"You on suit communications?"

"Yes, sir." Captain Arnold straightened and moved forward. The general replaced him and dropped his safety line in place with practiced efficiency.

Captain Arnold, surrounded by dust devils, became a distant, indistinct bulk. His motions were ponderous. The general could no longer see his face or his expression.

"I do not entirely understand this, David," the general said conversationally. "The investigation. I thought I had powerful friends in the Corps. Though a man makes enemies." The general lurched awkwardly over the broken surface of Miracastle, drawing the safety line taut. He moved toward the connection rail again. "A general is separated from much of his command. Some of the technical refinements are too involved — and, of course, men hide their feelings." Once again he struggled with the wind, turning slowly at the end of the safety line: held from the devouring anger of the planet only by the slender umbilical cord from the stars. "General Grisley, now. I think he's sixteen star, in headquarters. He was a politician. He came up fast. In fact, he was my adjutant a few years ago. He was always a man to hold a grudge."

Captain Arnold made no reply.

"You know how politics is in the Corps."

Dome Nine rose from the swirling mist before them. The wind seemed to increase in fury. And still, inside the suits, there was the sound only of labored breathing and the general's voice.

"These natives," the general said. "They were very primitive, David." Neither could see the other's face. "I can't think of them as intelligent at all. I feel they were very low on the evolutionary ladder. I wouldn't call it a city, as I've heard it called. Natural formation, more likely. Nature plays strange tricks."

THEY were at the lock of Dome Nine.

Inside, the general removed his helmet. "David," he said, "I've been meaning to talk to you for some time now. You've got a good career in front of you in the Corps. You're going to move up. With a few breaks, right to the top. I'm just now writing up my evaluation for your files. I plan to give you a very fine recommendation, Captain. Normally, I don't talk about this sort of thing, but I thought you might like to know."

"Thank you, sir," Captain

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Arnold said uneasily, opening his surface suit.

"Well, let's inspect the area, Captain."

The inspection was perfunctory. As he always did, the general paused at the pile monitor and watched, in the Dante screen, the virtually indescribable reactions being sustained far beneath the surface: molten rock flowing and smoking. Orange, blue and white flames danced as though in agony in the great, expanding cavern, danced and merged and vanished and reappeared in an ever-changing pattern.

Back at the locks, the general bid Captain Arnold good-by and turned to leave. Then, as if an afterthought came forward, he turned back.

"David, oh, David!"

"Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you remember a conversation we had a few weeks ago? I called on you for some technical advice." He held his helmet in his hands.

"When was that, sir?"

"Oh, it was about the technical feasibility of reversing the air-changing equipment, I believe. As you know, I can't be up on all the technical, purely detailed procedure, for all phases of the operation. That's what we have experts for." The last statement was unusually jovial. "I believe you told me, David, that the process was too far along at that time. Perhaps you remember?"

"General Shorter, when was that?"

"I thought you would remember, David. I'm sure it was you. Yes, I'm almost positive it was. But if you say . . . Well, David, it wasn't quite so much as exactly a statement like that. But that was the general meaning of it, you know, stripped of all the technical language. You have to take it in the over-all context. That was the meaning I got." He laughed tactfully. "You're like lawyers, all you technicians. You answer everything yes and no at the same time. I hoped you'd remember the conversation. I got that idea from it." The general waited. "Well, David — don't look like that — it's not at all important. Just trying to refresh my own memory. It's not important, really . . . Good night, David." He placed the helmet over his head.

"Good night, General."

Methodically the general completed his rounds. He laughed often and joked with the men and seemed in exceptionally good spirits.

Back in his own quarters, he brought out his diary. With a weary sigh, he sat down to it. He glanced at his timepiece. The day extended backward almost beyond memory but it was not yet late.

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After thumbing the diary listlessly for several minutes — pausing now and then at a paragraph — he began to write. He put the events of the day down precisely in their logical sequence.

IV

THE Committee took over the dining area when the general left for his tour of inspection. While the steward's department was preparing coffee for the interviewees, now assembling in the corridor, the four members of the Committee arranged themselves at the larger of the tables. Notepaper lay before them.

Mr. Tucker lighted a cigar and fingered it. "A rather good meal," he said.

The others nodded.

"I may as well start off, while we're waiting," Mr. Wallace said. "I'll summarize my somewhat contradictory observations.

"Superficially, the cultural level of the natives appeared quite primitive. The absence of tools would normally be indicative. On the other hand, the city was carved from rock in a way so as to suggest a very sophisticated technology. And writing, while apparently not practiced to any considerable extent, was known — or, if not writing as we understand it, some advanced decorative technique. We've found two tines of it, at least.

"Again superficially, the city would suggest a nomadic tradition, but for its craftsmanship. It seems independent of any obvious supply of food and their equivalent of water, if any. Nor were any provisions in evidence for the disposal of waste products. Yet the city had the appearance of age and continual usage. If you notice, the floor of the recess was worn unevenly toward the center by what I should guess to be the traffic of several centuries.

"The thought naturally occurs that the aliens were the rather decadent relics of a highly developed technological civilization existing on the planet in the not too distant past. Yet Miracastle offers no evidence for the existence of a prior technology — no ruins, no residual radioactivity from atomic operations. In short, the city has no apparent genesis in the past.

"The alternative arises: perhaps the natives were not natives at all, but immigrants or colonists like ourselves. Yet the age of the city contradicts this.

"Perhaps there is a simple explanation, although it does not occur to me. But I do have this feeling. The city was utilitarian. To me, it calls to mind one of those exquisite etchings of Picas-

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so. The severe economy of line suggests simplicity. Yet, on further inspection, you see that each line contributes to a rather bewildering variety of perspectives. I strongly suspect that the city and the people of Miracastle will remain one of the great, unsolved mysteries of the universe."

Mr. Wallace was finished with his remarks.

Mr. Ryan nodded. "Perhaps I'm deficient in sensibilities, but I find that the most . . . agonizing . . . thing of all is not ever to be able to know what these people were like. It's almost as if some part of us had been lopped off, isn't it? What did the people of Miracastle think about? What was their philosophy of life? What was their social organization? What was their ultimate goals? When you realize how much we learned of ourselves from an examination of our own primitive cultures, the sense of loss really comes home. Think how much more we could have learned of ourselves by acquiring the perspective of a truly alien culture. It's almost as if we could really understand ourselves at last if we could only understand a totally alien culture . . ."

"Well, that's gone," Mr. Tucker said. The words were brittle and discrete. They hung in memory and the listeners waited as though for an echo of something shouted into a canyon. The echo did not come.

They were silent. Grief is the final knowledge of time. When one first learns that it can never be turned backward upon itself to permit the correction of past sins and the rightings of wrongs transfixed and forever unalterable. Grief is the frantic, futile beating of hands against a barrier without substance, both obscenely unreal and yet the only reality. Grief is the knowledge that we cannot step backwards before the death of loved ones and see those precious half-forgotten dream faces once again. Grief is the knowledge that time is immutable.

Outside the Richardson Dome, the wind was changing. It could now neither support the life that was nor the life that would be, and it howled in melancholy and insensate anguish its loneliness and longing to the eternal and ever-changing pattern of the stars.

THE Committee concluded their interviews with an old-line corporal. He had just short of thirty years service and had several times traveled the two-way escalator of non-commissioned rank from master sergeant to private. He was perhaps typical of many of the older soldiers. His love of the Corps was ex-

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pressed by his loyalty to it; his hatred of the Corps was expressed by his inability to abide by its regulations.

"You knew Sergeant Schuster very well?" Mr. Tucker asked.

"He was a new man," the corporal said. "He got on just before lift-off. A week, two weeks, something like that. I knew him, I guess. He was one of them kind that was always thinking. And like you know, sir, thinking ain't too good for a soldier. I've known a lot of guys like that in my time. You know what I mean? They're not cut out for the Corps."

"He talked to you quite a bit?"

The corporal turned to face Mr. Ryan. "He was always talking, sir. He was a regular nut. I thought for a while he was queer. He had all those crazy ideas."

"Like what, Corporal?"

"Oh, like — well, you know." The corporal hesitated and rummaged his memory without conspicuous success. "Sunsets," he said rather emphatically. "Talked about sunsets. Talked about just *anything*. Called me out back on Earth to look at a sunset once, I remember."

"What did he think about killing the natives?" Mr. Wallace asked.

The question alerted the mechanism which produced the almost-Pavlovian loyalty response.

"We didn't kill no natives," the corporal said. "They just died when we changed the air. Tough."

He looked at Mr. Wallace and then into the silence around him.

"Well . . . well, let's see. I guess you'd say that sort of got to him. I mean, you know, he thought it was —" the voice became distant, as though describing a fantastic event which he could not relate to anything in a rational environment — "he thought it was *his* fault. You know how some of these guys are. I used to have a platoon once, you know. And they say —" He twisted his mouth and changed his voice to a childish whine. "What *for?*" The voice reverted to normal. "They don't ask for any reason. They just ask. I say to them, I say, 'God damn it' — excuse me, sir — 'I told you to do it, ain't that enough?' Well, this Schuster, sir, he worried all the time. He got so he cut himself shaving. Damnedest thing. Oh, hell, maybe for the last week, every morning, he came out a bloody mess. Patches of toilet paper all over his face. 'I can't shave,' he'd say. 'My God, I can't shave.' He wasn't nervous, either. His hands were okay. They didn't shake. It's just that he couldn't shave. Like I say, he was a nut."

No one spoke for a moment, and the corporal twisted uncomfortably.

Then Mr. Tucker said, "Well,

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Corporal, tell me this, please."

"Yes, sir."

"What's your own personal impression of General Shorter?"

"The old man?" the corporal asked in surprise. "He's okay."

"Feel free to discuss this," Mr. Flison said. "We'd like to know, really, what your opinion is."

"Like I say, he's okay. He's got a job to do. You know, he busted me once. General Shorter personally, I mean. Hell, I don't hold it against him, though. He's got his job to do, I got mine. I wouldn't say anything against General Shorter, no, sir. He's a soldier. I mean, you know . . . he's a soldier."

After the corporal was dismissed, Mr. Tucker said, "Well, gentlemen, I guess we've about wrapped it up here. I think this is enough. Anybody's mind changed? I don't think we need any more, do you?"

Mr. Wallace sighed heavily. He looked down at his hands.

GENERAL SHORTER was still at his writing desk when he was notified that Mr. Tucker would like to see him first thing in the morning.

"Another day of it, eh?" the general asked the sergeant who brought the message.

"No, sir. From the other crew, I hear they're planning to leave tomorrow."

The general's face relaxed. His smile reflected weary tolerance. "Had enough in one day, have they? It's about time they let us get back to work."

After the sergeant left, the general wrote a final paragraph:

"I've just been informed the 'investigation' is completed. In record time, it seems. They finished up in the mess tonight, talking to some of the men. So what did it all really accomplish? They took a long ship that could better have been used somewhere else. Half my men are down with the virus. They almost cost me my schedule. And to what end? Just another piece of paper somewhere. Put Miracastle on the scale against some nice, heavy report and see which way the scale tips."

The general closed the diary. It was late now. He was very tired.

MR. TUCKER, after breakfast, knocked on the general's door.

"Come in," General Shorter called.

The civilian entered. The general dismissed the orderly with a nod. "And I'll need some clean towels for tonight," he called. His voice was hoarse.

"Yes, sir."

The door closed. The two of them were alone.

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"Sit down. Excuse the cold. Got it last night. What do you say to a brandy?"

"Don't let me stop you."

"I never drink alone."

"Perhaps you'd better," Mr. Tucker said.

The general had paused just short of the cupboard. He turned slowly. "In that case, I'll make an exception, this once." He poured. "Just what did you mean by that, sir? Let's get to the point."

"General Shorter, we're going to have to ask you to come back with us."

The general bent slightly forward. His lips were partly open, as though he were listening to hear a second time.

"Why," he said, "I've too much work to do, sir. I'm afraid that's out of the question. It's just not possible at all."

Mr. Tucker waited.

General Shorter poured himself another brandy. His back was to the civilian.

"There's nothing more important, right now, than my job here," he said. He drank the brandy in a single gulp.

"I don't see how it can wait, General," Mr. Tucker said.

The general's lips were dry. He closed his eyes tightly for a moment against the alcohol and the cold. He licked his lips. "What's the formal charge?"

Mr. Tucker bent forward. His voice was soft and curious, as though the question were his final effort to understand something that puzzled him for a long time. "What do you think it is, General?"

"What could it be?" the general said sharply. "I follow orders, sir. I was sent out here to make this planet suitable for human habitation. This is exactly what I have been doing." His voice was growing progressively more angry and with an effort he curbed himself. "Put yourself in my position. I did what any field commander would have done. It was too late to stop it. I've got — It's a question of the limits of normal prudence. A matter of interpretation, sir."

The general was in the process of pouring still another drink. The slender brandy glass broke under the force of his anger. He opened his palm. Blood trickled from between his fingers.

The general looked up from the hand and fleeting annoyance came and went before he was recalled to present reality. His eyes met Mr. Tucker's.

Mr. Tucker suddenly shivered as if touched by a wind from beyond the most distant stars, a wind which whispered: *The aliens are among us.*

"General," Mr. Tucker said, "the formal charge is murder."

— KRIS NEVILLE

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The place called Sodom was bad enough. But right down the road was the other town — and that was even worse!

Sodom and Gomorrah, Texas

By R. A. LAFFERTY

Illustrated by RITTER

MANUEL shouldn't have been employed as a census taker. He wasn't qualified. He couldn't read a map. He didn't know what a map was. He only grinned when they told him that North was at the top.

He knew better.

But he did write a nice round hand, like a boy's hand. He knew Spanish, and enough English. For the sector that was assigned to him he would not need a map. He knew it better than anyone else, certainly better than any map-maker. Besides, he was poor and needed the money.

They instructed him and sent him out. Or they thought that they had instructed him. They couldn't be sure.

"Count everyone? All right. Fill in everyone? I need more papers."

"We will give you more if you need more. But there aren't so many in your sector."

"Lots of them. *Lobos, tejones, zorros,* even people."

"Only the *people,* Manuel! Do not take the animals. How would you write up the animals? They have no names."

"Oh, yes. All have names. Might as well take them all."

"Only people, Manuel."

"Mulos?"

"No."

"Conejos?"

"No, Manuel, no. Only the people."

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"No trouble. Might as well take them all."

"Only people—God give me strength!—only people, Manuel."

"How about little people?"

"Children, yes. That has been explained to you."

"*Little* people. Not children. little people."

"If they are people, take them."

"How big they have to be?"

"It doesn't make any difference how big they are. If they are people, take them."

That is where the damage was done.

The official had given a snap judgement, and it led to disaster. It was not his fault. The instructions are not clear. Nowhere in all the verbiage does it say how big they have to be to be counted as people.

MANUEL took Mula and went to work. His sector was the Santa Magdalena, a scrap of bald-headed and desolate mountains, steep but not high, and so torrid in the afternoons that it was said that the old lava sometimes began to writhe and flow again from the sun's heat alone.

In the center valley there were five thousand acres of slag and vitrified rock from some forgotten old blast that had melted the hills and destroyed their mantle, reducing all to a terrible flatness. This was called Sodom. It was strewn with low-lying ghosts as of people and objects, formed when the granite bubbled like water.

Away from the dead center the ravines were body-deep in chaparral, and the hillsides stood gray-green with old cactus. The stunted trees were lower than the giant bushes and yucca.

Manuel went with Mula, a round easy man and a sparse gaunt mule. Mula was a mule, but there were other inhabitants of the Santa Magdalena of a genus less certain.

Yet even about Mula there was an oddity in her ancestry. Her paternal grandfather had been a goat. Manuel once told Mr. Marshal about this, but Mr. Marshal had not accepted it.

"She is a mule. Therefore, her father was a jack. Therefore his father was also a jack, a donkey. It could not be any other way."

Manuel often wondered about that, for he had raised the whole strain of animals, and he remembered who had been with whom.

"A donkey! A jack! Two feet tall and with a beard and horns. I always thought that he was a goat."

Manuel and Mula stopped at noon on Lost Soul Creek. There would be no travel in the hot afternoon. But Manuel had a job to do, and he did it. He took the forms from one of the packs that he had unslung from Mula, and

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counted out nine of them. He wrote down all the data on nine people. He knew all there was to know about them, their nativities and their antecedents. He knew that there were only nine regular people in the nine hundred square miles of the Santa Magdalena.

But he was systematic, so he checked the list over again and again. There seemed to be somebody missing. Oh, yes, himself. He got another form and filled out all the data on himself.

Now, in one way of looking at it, his part in the census was finished. If only he had looked at it that way, he would have saved worry and trouble for everyone, and also ten thousand lives. But the instructions they had given him were ambiguous, for all that they had tried to make them clear.

So very early the next morning he rose and cooked beans, and said, "Might as well take them all."

He called Mula from the thorn patch where she was grazing, gave her salt and loaded her again. Then they went to take the rest of the census, but in fear. There was a clear duty to get the job done, but there was also a dread of it that his superiors did not understand. There was reason also why Mula was loaded so she could hardly walk with packs of census forms.

Manuel prayed out loud as they climbed the purgatorial scarp above Lost Souls Creek, *"ruega por nosotros pecadores ahora—"* the very gulches stood angry and stark in the early morning—*"y en la hora de neustra muerte."*

THREE days later an incredible dwarf staggered into the outskirts of High Plains, Texas, followed by a dying wolf-sized animal that did not look like a wolf.

A lady called the police to save the pair from rock-throwing kids who might have killed them, and the two as yet unclassified things were taken to the station house.

The dwarf was three foot high, a skeleton stretched over with brown-burnt leather. The other was an un-canine looking dog-sized beast, so full of burrs and thorns that it might have been a porcupine. It was a nightmare replica of a shrunken mule.

The midget was mad. The animal had more presence of mind: she lay down quietly and died, which was the best she could do, considering the state that she was in.

"Who is census chief now?" asked the mad midget. "Is Mr. Marshal's boy the census chief?"

"Mr. Marshal is, yes. Who are you? How do you know Marshal? And what is that which you are pulling out of your pants, if they are pants?"

"Census list. Names of every-

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body in the Santa Magdalena. I had to steal it."

"It looks like microfilm, the writing is so small. And the roll goes on and on. There must be a million names here."

"Little bit more, little bit more. I get two bits a name."

They got Marshal there. He was very busy, but he came. He had been given a deadline by the mayor and the citizen's group. He had to produce a population of ten thousand people for High Plains, Texas; and this was difficult, for there weren't that many people in the town. He had been working hard on it, though; but he came when the police called him.

"You Marshal's little boy? You look just like your father," said the midget.

"That voice, I should know that voice even if it's cracked to pieces. That has to be Manuel's voice."

"Sure, I'm Manuel. Just like I left, thirty-five years ago."

"You can't be Manuel, shrunk three feet and two hundred pounds and aged a million."

"You look here at my census slip. It says I'm Manuel. And here are nine more of the regular people, and one million of the little people. I couldn't get them on the right forms, though. I had to steal their list."

"You can't be Manuel," said Marshal.

"He can't be Manuel," said the big policemen and the little policeman.

"Maybe not, then," the dwarf conceded. "I thought I was, but I wasn't sure. Who am I then? Let's look at the other papers and see which one I am."

"No, you can't be any of them either, Manuel. And you surely can't be Manuel."

"Give him a name anyhow and get him counted. We got to get to that ten thousand mark."

"Tell us what happened, Manuel—if you are. Which you aren't. But tell us."

"After I counted the regular people I went to count the little people. I took a spade and spaded off the top of their town to get in. But they put an *encanto* on me, and made me and Mula run a treadmill for thirty-five years."

"Where was this?"

"At the little people town. Nuevo Danae. But after thirty-five years the *encanto* wore off and Mula and I stole the list of names and ran away."

"But where did you really get this list of so many names written so small?"

"Suffering saddle sores, Marshal, don't ask the little bug so many questions. You got a million names in your hand. Certify them! Send them in! There's enough of us here right now. We declare that place annexed forthwith. This will make High Plains

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the biggest town in the whole state of Texas."

SO Marshal certified them and sent them into Washington. This gave High Plains the largest percentage increase of any city in the nation, but it was challenged. There were some soreheads in Houston who said that it wasn't possible. They said High Plains had nowhere near that many people and there must have been a miscount.

And in the days that the argument was going on, they cleaned up and fed Manuel, if it were he, and tried to get from him a cogent story.

"How do you know it was thirty-five years you were on the treadmill, Manuel?"

"Well, it seemed like thirty-five years."

"It could have only been about three days."

"Then how come I'm so old?"

"We don't know that, Manuel, we sure don't know that. How big were these people?"

"Who knows? A finger long, maybe two?"

"And what is their town?"

"It is an old prairie-dog town that they fixed up. You have to dig down with a spade to get to the streets."

"Maybe they were really all prairie dogs, Manuel. Maybe the heat got you and you only dreamed that they were little people."

"Prairie dogs can't write as good as on that list. Prairie dogs can't write hardly at all."

"That's true. The list is hard to explain. And such odd names on it too."

"Where is Mula? I don't see Mula since I came back."

"Mula just lay down and died, Manuel."

"Gave me the slip. Why didn't I think of that? Well, I'll do it too. I'm too worn out for anything else."

"Before you do, Manuel, just a couple of last questions."

"Make them real fast then. I'm on my way."

"Did you know these little people were there before?"

"Oh, sure. There a long time."

"Did anybody else ever see them?"

"Oh, sure. Everybody in the Santa Magdalena see them. Eight, nine people see them."

"And Manuel, how do we get to the place? Can you show us on a map?"

Manuel made a grimace, and died quietly as Mula had done. He didn't understand those maps at all, and took the easy way out.

They buried him, not knowing for sure whether he was Manuel come back, or what he was.

There wasn't much of him to bury.

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IT was the same night, very late and after he had been asleep, that Marshal was awakened by the ring of an authoritative voice. He was being harangued by a four-inch tall man on his bedside table, a man of dominating presence and acid voice.

"Come out of that cot, you clown! Give me your name and station!"

"I'm Marshal, and I suspect that you are a late pig sandwich, or caused by one. I shouldn't eat so late."

"Say 'sir' when you reply to me. I am no pig sandwich and I do not commonly call on fools. Get on your feet, you clod."

And wonderingly Marshal did.

"I want the list that was stolen. Don't gape! Get it!"

"What list?"

"Don't stall, don't stutter. Get me our tax list that was stolen. It isn't words that I want from you."

"Listen, you cicada, I'll take you and—"

"You will not. You will notice that you are paralyzed from the neck down. I suspect that you were always so from there up. Where is the list?"

"S-sent it to Washington."

"You bug-eyed behemoth! Do you realize what a trip that will be? You grandfather of inanities, it will be a pleasure to destroy you!"

"I don't know what you are, or if you are really. I don't believe that you even belong on the world."

"Not belong on the world! We own the world. We can show written title to the world. Can you?"

"I doubt it. Where did you get the title?"

"None of your business. I'd rather not say. Oh, well, we got it from a promoter of sorts. A con man, really. I'll have to admit that we were taken, but we were in a spot and needed a world. He said that the larger bifurcates were too stupid to be a nuisance. We should have known that the stupider a creature, the more of a nuisance it is."

"I had about decided the same thing about the smaller a creature. We may have to fumigate that old mountain mess."

"Oh, you can't harm us. We're too powerful. But we can obliterate you in an instant."

"Hah!"

"Say 'Hah, *sir*' when you address me. Do you know the place in the mountain that is called Sodom?"

"I know the place. It was caused by a large meteor."

"It was caused by one of these."

What he held up was the size of a grain of sand. Marshal could not see it in detail.

"There was another city of you bug-eyed beasts there," said the small martinet. "You wouldn't

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know about it. It's been a few hundred years. We decided it was too close. Now I have decided that you are too close."

"A thing that size couldn't crack a walnut."

"You floundering fop, it will blast this town flat!"

"What will happen to you?"

"Nothing. I don't even blink for things like that."

"How do you trigger it off."

"You gaping goof, I don't have time to explain that to you. I have to get to Washington."

It may be that Marshal did not believe himself quite awake. He certainly did not take the threat seriously enough. For the little man did trigger it off.

WHEN the final count was in, High Plains did not have the highest percentage gain in population in the nation. Actually it showed the sharpest decline, from 7313 to nothing.

They were going to make a forest preserve out of the place, except that it has no trees worthy of the name. Now it is proposed to make it the Sodom and Gomorrah State Park from the two mysterious scenes of desolation there, just seven miles apart.

It is an interesting place, as wild a region as you will ever find, and is recommended for the man who has seen everything.

— R. A. LAFFERTY

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He brought them life and hope.
Why wouldn't the fools take it from him?

By HELEN M. URBAN

THE GLORY OF IPPLING

THERE'S an axiom in the galaxy: The more complicated the machine, the bigger mess it can make. Like the time the planetary computer for Buughabyta flipped its complete grain-futures series. The computer ordered only 15 acres, and Buughabytians had to live for a full year off the government's stored surplus — thus pounding down the surplus, forcing up the price, eliminating the subsidy and balancing the Buughabytian budget for fifteen years — an unprecedented bit of nonsense that almost had permanent effects. But a career economist with an eye for flubup and complication managed to restore balanced disorder, bringing Buughabyta right back to normalcy.

Or like the time a matter-duplicator receiver misread OCH_3CH_3-OH, to turn out a magnificently busted blonde sphygmomanohm-raiser with an $HOCH_3OH$ replacement, putting a strain on the loyalty of a billion teen-age girls dedicated to Doyle Oglevie worship. Doyle-she insisted she was Doyle-he, as it took quite a while for her hormones to overcome the memory of his easy, eyelash-flapping, tone-torturing microphone conquests. Put a strain on his wardrobe, too.

No machine, of course, can compare for complexity with any group of humans who have been collected into machine-like preci-

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sion of operation. Take one time when an Ipplinger Cultural Contact Group was handed a Boswellister with V.I.P. connections and orders to put him to an assignment — for his maturity.

BOSWELLISTER sat patiently. He squirmed emotionally up and down his backbone, but he affected a disdainful appearance of patience in view of the importance of his and his poppa's positions compared with the pawn-like minusculity of the audience's.

The Blond Terror strode majestically down the aisle of the open air sports arena, preceded by twenty-four harem-darling dancing girls. The orchestra wailed an oriental sinuosity of woodwinds and drums, accompanying the hip-twitching, nearly naked, sloe- (by benefit of make-up) eyed, black-haired beauties.

Fifteen heavyweights, draped in leopard skins, had preceded the dancers to set up the Blond Terror's tub on a polar bear rug in the center of the ring. A dozen luscious watercarriers had emptied their jars into the tub. Soap and towels, oils and perfumes, mirror and comb were arranged on top of a lushly ornamented box that stood by one of the corner posts.

The Blond Terror vaulted the ropes and stood in the ring, popping his muscles, waiting for his handmaidens to remove the five layers of elaborately decorated robes that were draped over his super-manly body.

Boswellister cringed slightly (inwardly), speculating that the Blond Terror really was a muscled man. All that man — nearly seven feet tall, bronzed, developed, imperious, condescending to notice just slightly the adulations of the women in the packed arena.

The Blond Terror stepped into the tub, carrying out his advertised boast of being the cleanest wrestler in the ring, a boast he was unable to prove with ring action through the exigencies of type-casting, for the Blond Terror was the villain.

The Blond Terror muscled down into the tub. He was scrubbed, then rinsed. He stood out onto the white fur rug and sneeringly allowed his handmaidens to pat him dry and powder him down. They held up the large hand mirror and allowed him to view his handsomeness while his short-cropped, blond curls were carefully combed.

"Now." Boswellister spoke the order into the lapel receiver. On the Ipplinger starship a communications tech slapped home a switch and the solido-vision circle settled over the Blond Terror's head, a halo of solid light for a

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complex Ipplinger signal-reaction device.

"Hail Ippling!" Boswellister shouted.

Boswellister strained forward, clutching the seat arms. It had to work! His equation must be right! The symbol had the proper cultural connotations. It was bound to capture the audience, put them in the right mood of awe-struck superstitious reverence, make the revelation of the great circle of the Ipplinger starship overhead a thing of wonderment and devotion-focus.

The Blond Terror should now look upwards, guide the eyes of the audience, bring them to the recognition. After all, as a Boswellister . . . and according to his great grandfather, and his poppa too . . .

But the Blond Terror gazed appreciatively into the mirror, smiling slyly at the audience.

The crowd roared its applause for the trick lighting effect. You could depend on the Blond Terror. No matter how many times you'd seen his act, he always managed to come up with something new. Now, for the opening of the new Million Dollar Ventura Boulevard Open Air Sports Arena, the Blond Terror had done it again.

Boswellister shouted. He pointed. He stared upwards, trying to draw the crowd with his vehemence. But he couldn't capture one gaze, no matter what he did.

He poked the man seated next to him, but the surly fool snarled, "Shuddup! The Hatchet Man's goin' into his act!"

BOSWELLISTER moaned.

There it was, sailing in the night sky, illuminated with soft etherealness to give the proper effect to these superstition-ridden people. All they had to do was glance up and accord to Ippling the superiority that was Ippling's, and they would be brought gently, delicately into galactic contact, opening out their narrow ways into the broad ways of the galactic universal worlds. With Boswellister to lead them.

But he couldn't make the play. Not a head would tilt up. The TV cameras that should be scanning the great lighted circle of the Ipplinger starship had swung to the entrance, waiting for the Hatchet Man.

And here he came, down the aisle like a bolt of Chinese lightning. He vaulted the ropes, leaped to the tub, overturned it and was gone back up the aisle before the Blond Terror could retaliate. Bath water sopped the piles of robes and made a mess out of the bearskin rug; but the ring attendants carted everything off, removed the waterproof canvas from the ring mat and pre-

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pared to get the match underway.

The Blond Terror paced in his corner, waving his hand mirror, challenging the Hatchet Man to quick, bloody death. And every few moments he'd stop to gaze admiringly into the mirror, running his hand along the edge of the solid band of light, grabbing all the credit for Ipplinger electronic science. He turned on cue to give the TV audience a full-face closeup.

Boswellister cursed himself for choosing the Blond Terror. That cynical, egocentric muscle artist was too pleased with himself to have any room in his thoughts for proper superstitious awe, and too stupid to recognize the superior science in back of the halo device.

"Remove the device," Boswellister ordered. There was no point in allowing it to stay, and that band of solid light, immovably in place on the wrestler's head, made a perfect battering ram for head-butting mayhem.

Boswellister paid no attention to the gladiators-at-mat; he left his seat as soon as the device was removed and walked out onto Ventura Boulevard. He went over his cultural equation, trying to find the flaw.

In the year he had spent on the preliminary survey, he had assessed this cultural equation to the last decimal point of surety. He had absolute faith in these people's superstitions. He knew what to expect; but somewhere the equation had been off. He should have chosen a quieter event, he guessed. The audience had been too well schooled in the acceptance of the spectacular.

What was needed was a more acute contrast, and suddenly he had it: the burlesque runway. He had watched it many times . . . and there was one girl, a big-bodied blonde with mild eyes.

He checked his watch and hurried his pace. It was about time for Dodie's turn on the runway that extended out from the front of the gambling house.

With satisfaction, Boswellister called up the memory of Dodie's peel act. This would be a natural, and he couldn't think why he hadn't decided on it right away.

IN many ways Dodie was a big girl. In clothes she could never be the fashion ideal, but she certainly made a good thing out of nakedness. Her soft, heavy, white breasts made old men blanch and young men start to grab. She was tall, with a narrow waist, flaring hips, long curvy legs and arms; with those big, innocent blue eyes, wearing high heels and an ounce of flimsy, up there on the burlesque runway . . . mmm . . . Boswellister groaned.

She wouldn't date Boswellister a second time no matter what he

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promised, and his promises had included many things she'd never before heard of. Boswellister squirmed momentarily.

It was too bad there wasn't a better crowd. Most of the Boulevard's regulars were at the Arena opening, but there were a few loiterers, standing along the curb, watching the free show. And all he had to do was make a beginning, Boswellister felt. He was sure that everything would roll by itself after that. He had faith in his superstition equation.

Dodie peeled. She seemed headed for complete nakedness at any moment, but to Boswellister's surprise, the revealing costume contained more pieces than he had remembered.

"Any moment now," he whispered to the solido-tech. "Now, wait . . . there . . . that should be the last piece. Settle the device around her head," he ordered. Then he groaned and countermanded the order. He had remembered Dodie's details, not her act. For at the last moment she slipped to the wings, dropping the last swatch of lace to slide down one long, white, outthrust leg.

Oh, blessed Ippling! There was his ship, floating majestically overhead, but no one would give it a glance. He pointed to it. These men *must* follow his excited gestures and look up; but they were busy calling suggestions to the line of ponies who had taken over the runway. Boswellister felt as if he were standing in a desert, surrounded by a mob of phantoms from his own imagination.

The crying voice of the gambling-house barker rode in over the clang and brass of jazzy music, but he couldn't turn the tip. As soon as the line-girls left the over-the-sidewalk runway, the idlers moved on down the street to take in the next spot's free outdoor lure show.

Boswellister leaned against the wall and watched the barker wipe his sweat-soaked forehead. He felt kinship with the man in his failure. The manager came out and talked to the barker for a moment. Boswellister overheard: "Dodie didn't draw one customer. A buck ain't to be made these days."

The barker replied, shaking his head, "They're oversold, Marve. The give-away is all they want."

Boswellister turned away and walked towards his motel. They wanted the give-away, but the glory of Ippling he had to give made no impression. He felt desperate. He had to make one more try.

His family position demanded obedience from the starship officers and crew. He stopped for a moment and gave a swift com-

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mand into the lapel pick-up, then went on to his motel room.

THE next morning, full of confidence after a good breakfast, he headed for the intersection of Laurel Canyon and Ventura Boulevards. There he would make his stand.

The boulevard swarmed with women shoppers. Cars and trucks roared by. The spectacular signs and free lure show runways were closed down, for ballyhoo of a different character had taken their place for the daytime.

Boswellister stopped for a moment to watch a demonstrator work before a huge, block-long, glittering drugstore.

The demonstrator went into his pitch:

"— money back. Now watch! Into a wet glass I pour a small amount of medically tested Calsobisidine. See how the Calsobisidine clings to the sides of the wet glass."

The pitchman smiled with flawless teeth and the women smiled back at him. His shoes were waxed and buffed; his hair fell in a black curl across his high forehead; his gardenia dripped dew like the ones in the box by his elbow. Each bottle of Calsobisidine came complete with an intimate smile from the pitchman, a fresh gardenia pinned on the breast by his clever fingers and a trial sample bottle. Just for six ninety-five, plus tax.

"In the exact same manner, Calsobisidine clings to the lining of your stomach and intestines, giving positive relief from burning pain and acid indigestion."

This puzzled Boswellister, and he remarked in a voice that seemed overloud, "But who has glass insides?"

The women giggled and turned away.

The pitchman's scowl was a menace; his voice bitter: "Go on, scram. You queered my tip."

Boswellister slipped away while the pitchman started to collect a new crowd. He popped into the entrance of the drugstore, and as always stood momentarily amazed by the bewildering variety of merchandise. Gardening implements, paper goods, dishes and glassware, whiskey, Calsobisidine, a huge display of baby dolls that performed every human function but reproduction. . . .

Then he gasped and walked towards the inside demonstration. There, presided over by a fake medical man, dressed in operating room regalia, including mask, rubber gloves and stethescope; there, right in the middle of the block-long drugstore, a demonstration of the newest educational doll was taking place. The doll, stretched out on a miniature hospital delivery table, was being de-

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livered of a replica new-born infant.

Again and again the "doctor" performed the delivery, alternately inserting the doll-baby into the doll-mamma and removing it.

Boswellister flushed and walked quickly away. He had no doubt of the toy's educational value, but nevertheless — he sighed deeply.

When Boswellister reached the corner of Ventura and Laurel Canyon, he made his stand on the southeast corner, facing the hills over which the Ipplinger starship would come to hover over the intersection and be revealed by him.

He contacted control and ordered the halo focus for his head. He reached up and felt the circle, planted firmly over his brow. He smiled to himself and went into his pitch.

"PEOPLE of Earth," he began in a quavering voice, then he remembered the Calsobisidine demonstrator, firmed up his tones and started again. "People of Earth! Listen to the message from the stars!"

"Selling horoscopes," a woman answered her child's question.

"What's a horrorscope, mamma?"

"A bunch of hooey," she snapped in reply, scowled at Boswellister and jerked her child complainingly down the street behind her.

"People of Earth!" Boswellister stated commandingly. He grasped a man's arm, saying, "Stand still a moment, friend, and hear the promise of Ippling. Glory beyond your imagination can be yours with the ascendancy of Ippling in this world of tears and sorrows."

The man jerked away. "What the hell, Mac!" He looked searchingly at Boswellister and muttered, "Geez, a nut." He stood back from Boswellister to listen, smilingly superior, tolerantly waiting to be entertained. A woman dragging a toddler stopped, then several other people stopped to see until Boswellister had about ten people standing around him.

"People of Earth!" he started in again, but he was interrupted by a cackling voice from the rear.

"Where else?"

The small crowd laughed and started to move away, but Boswellister stood straight and commanded them. "Listen! Wait for a moment and learn your glorious destiny.

"Now," he said quietly into the lapel pickup, and the great doughnut circle of the Ipplinger starship sailed in close over the hills. A line of brush fire followed the starship.

Boswellister held up his hands

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and pointed. "Behold the glory of Ippling that can be yours!" He held onto the halo, trying to get them to follow the symbolism. "Look upwards!" He screamed at them, but they watched the brush fire that swept the hill top. It was a goodie. It would wipe out a number of homes.

He grabbed a boy by the arm and demanded, "Look at the Ipplinger starship. Behold the glory of Ippling!"

The ten-year-old sneered. "Yah! That's the new 1993 Lockheed X69-P37 experimental ship. I got a model last week."

"No, no, lad! The Ipplinger starship, come to Earth to bring the blessings of Ippling's culture to his backwards planet. Ippling will save you from wars and ills, from poverty and hatred. Ippling will be your destiny. Follow me, Boswellister! Ippling will lead you to the stars! Glory for all!" Boswellister patted the boy on the head.

"Keep your hands off me, you big stiff!"

Boswellister gulped and pointed upwards. "See the Ipplinger starship!"

"Aah! Shuddup!"

His mother jerked his arm in reproof. "How many times I've gotta tell you not to say, shuddup. Say, SHUT UP! S-H-U-T U-P!"

"Aah!" the boy said in disgust. "Everybody knows starships are big rockets!" He'd said the final word; he had no more interest in Boswellister, for the fire engines were coming.

THEY sirened down Ventura and turned up Laurel Canyon, their heavy motors, air horns and sirens drowning out Boswellister's speech. Cars had piled up at the intersection to wait for the fire engines to make their swing, and Boswellister leaped to the middle of the intersection as soon as the trucks had turned.

He held up his arms and went into his *People of Earth* spiel again. But angry, blasting horns cut his voice to nothing. The drivers pressed close in on him, pinpointing him in the middle of the intersection. Shouts and jeers and horns; the roaring scream of fire engines; people running and shouting; Ventura at Laurel Canyon was a cacophonous maelstrom.

A traffic officer screeched his copcycle to a halt and made his way to the center of the mass of tangled traffic. He blew his whistle and waved his arms, ordering Boswellister to the sidewalk, but Boswellister refused to move. He had his mission on Earth.

Boswellister shouted over the piled-up noise, waving his hand to the sky, calling to them to follow his lead to the glory of Ippling.

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The officer grabbed his coat collar and hustled him to the sidewalk. "You're under arrest!"

"You can't arrest *me!*" Boswellister squirmed and jerked away. He shouted, "Follow me!" and ran north, a good part of the crowd after him. He shrieked an order into the pickup while he ran over the bridge towards Moorpark.

A woman spotted the Ipplinger starship that followed overhead. "Free samples!" she screamed, and those who had lagged behind fell into a run with the crowd following Boswellister.

The northwest corner of Laurel Canyon and Moorpark had been cleared of houses for the erection of a new billion-dollar shopping center, and the ground was smooth and bare. Here, in the center of the five-acre construction site, the Ipplinger starship settled to Earth.

The Ipplinger Supreme Starship Commander was panic-stricken. He had to rescue Boswellister from that sample-seeking mob. If Boswellister should be trampled and injured! Each screamed demand, picked up by Boswellister's lapel microphone, sent the Supreme Commander's blood pressure up another notch, and the moment the ramp was unshipped he hit the ground.

Officers and crewmen quickly lined up to pipe Boswellister aboard. But the crowd pushed in close, forcing Boswellister to the rear as they screamed for their free samples. Two bulky crewmen stood embattled by the entrance port, strongarming the kids who tried to storm through the port and inside.

"Space Angel's inside!" That was their battle cry as they tried to wriggle under the legs of the crewmen.

"Ya sellin' Oatbombs?" one screamed in the commander's ear, then reached up to snatch off a shoulder patch.

Boswellister stood in the rear of the crowd and wrung his hands while the crowd clamored for their samples.

"Give us the pitch, then pass out the stuff!"

"Lookit that ship! Ain't it a dilly! Whatcha sellin', Wheatsnaps?"

"Bring on the dames!"

THEY pressed in close to the starship, running their hands over the slick metal surface.

"Boy, what a prop! Bet it cost a million bucks. What ya sellin', mister?"

"Sanity!" Boswellister shouted from the rear.

His men tried to hold their ranks, but the crowd broke the lines, jerking the medals off their chests for souvenirs.

Boswellister was almost babbling by the time the commander

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and his men battled their way to him.

"You saw it all! You know!" Boswellister protested. "That Blond Terror and his harem darlings, and those violence-avid ruffians in the audience! Dodie, the stripper, with her lip-licking ogglers! That Calsobisidine pitchman, oozing allure and implied invitation! My equation! My precious equation, buried under a mass of pills, lotions, toys, food, clothes and everything sold with a bump and grind!"

They fought to the ship with him, while the crowd opposed each step, yelling for entertainment, for TV cameras, for samples of anything.

"How could I have missed it?" Boswellister moaned. "I should have sold them with sex, right from the beginning."

"What do you do, handsome? Sing?" A bundle-clutching housewife breathed into his face, stepping on the commander's foot as she shoved in close to Boswellister.

"Take me home!" Boswellister beseeched the commander.

The officers and crew, tattered, demedaled, bruised and completely defeated in morale, formed a flying wedge and drove for the safety of the ship.

The ramp retracted. The port closed, then opened briefly to eject a nosey boy, closing finally on the demands and the mocking laughter and the clangor of arriving police cars.

"Raise ship!" the commander ordered. He sopped at the blood from his gashed arm and said to his first officer, "Somebody in that mob used a knife to go after those service stripes."

The first shuddered. "Ugly brutes."

Boswellister leaned against the corridor bulkhead and sighed as the Ipplinger starship rose from the ground. How could he explain to his poppa? All his brothers had won their worlds. He *would* do it. He squared his shoulders. After all, he was a Boswellister. Boswellister XIV, no less. A son of Gaphroldshan IX himself, the Prince of Ippling World LXIV, a Royal Prince of the Central Ippling.

He walked resolutely to the control room, riding the crest of his refurbished dignity.

"Put me down on that planet we spotted last year," he ordered. "What was that star map number?"

"G.S.R. 285139-F. R. A. 592-105-R.U. 13," his alert assistant astronomical officer answered, reading the number from a prepared memorandum.

Boswellister hesitated. Should he reprimand the officer for anticipating his failure or compliment him for his efficiency? Boswellister backed water and went

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to his room to learn the language he'd need, while the officers pulled their own demoralized spirits together so they could go to work on the crew when the news broke that they weren't going home.

THEY made a quick passage to their destination, and Boswellister — well rested, well fed, hypnotically tutored, supplied with communicators, a synthesizer for his food and a portable equation writer strapped to his back, and his irrepressible, dauntless belief in himself in triumphant operation — stepped from the ramp onto this newest world of his Princely destiny.

"Circle in orbit," he ordered. "I'll call you when I need you."

Boswellister walked confidently down the road to town. He congratulated himself on having learned, also on his wise humility in admitting the fact of his having learned. He smiled now at the naiveté with which he had approached his first try at establishing a realm for his Ipplinger Princedom rights.

He had been so full of illusions that he had landed openly, had stepped right up and announced that he had come to establish his household and rear his own Princes, who would, in their maturity, leave to win their own worlds. In addition to their being small-minded on that first world about his needing five wives for his household, they had nearly managed to commit him to a lunatic asylum, for he had overlooked, in his equation, the fact that his first planet, with its two suns and perpetual daylight, had never known about the stars. There had been no way to break through their wall of stupidity, and he had left, the planet's sanity-police close on his heels. Had he used money it would have been a cinch, he had realized as soon as he was safely in the ship.

That hard-earned lesson he had applied to his second planet, but there superstition meant more than money, though money had seemed on the surface to be the answer to everything. On that second planet he had made the error of buying his way into the half-political, half-religious temple setup and had tried to bring the local superstitions into line with Ipplinger Reality Philosophy. They had lost an officer and three men when they rescued him from the temple's torture chamber; and none too soon, for he had been taking quite a stretching when his rescue had arrived.

Applied on Earth, the superstition equation had not paid off. He had failed to notice that they didn't really believe in their religions and superstitions, though they showed every indication of

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being extremely devout and credulous. He should have sold Earth, and sold it with sex.

Well, he had learned, all right, and here, on this new world, in this fresh start, he would show how well he had learned. In the idiom of Ventura Boulevard, he'd hit 'em with the whole deck, deuces wild. He'd give 'em sex and money and superstition and to hell with fact and logic.

These primitive worlds had to be brought slowly into a respect for logic; for Ipplinger logic, the only valid system of logic in the whole universe.

In the hovering ship, the commander turned to the astrogator and said, with the bitterness of yesterday's conflict with the mutinous crew evident in his voice, "Well, our little vaporized circuit is off again." He motioned to the image of Boswellister in the forward viewscreen.

It was a sight that tended to increase the tremor in the astrogator's hands. He replied, "I only hope we can pull the crew through another pickup. Home and family! Do they think I want mine any less?"

Boswellister marched confidently down the road. He *would* succeed, for didn't he have the well oiled machinery of the whole Ipplinger starship crew of cultural contact specialists to back him up?

WHILE he walked, he practiced the strident-voiced delivery of extravagant lies he had learned so well and had so magnificently imitated from the Ventura Boulevard pitch artists. He practiced the leering insinuendo of the barker outside the gambling hall; he gave it the Calsobisidine con come-on; he sold it solid, dripping with sex, twitching with lure.

He knew that here, finally, he would succeed.

Boswellister XIV, Noble Prince of Ippling, smiled his confidence in his sex-money-superstition equation as he walked briskly down the road to begin his contact with a world that had substituted vat-culture procreation for sex; that had abolished money in favor of a complicated system of verbal, personal-honor swapping credits; that had no religions of superstitions. A world of people who considered the most sweetly distilled essence of living to be the minute investigation of the fine points of logical discourse, engaged in on the basis of an incredibly multiplied logic structure composed of thirty-seven separate systems of discursive regulations, the very first of which was based on a planetary absolute, the rejection and ridicule of all persuasive techniques and those who used them.

— HELEN M. URBAN

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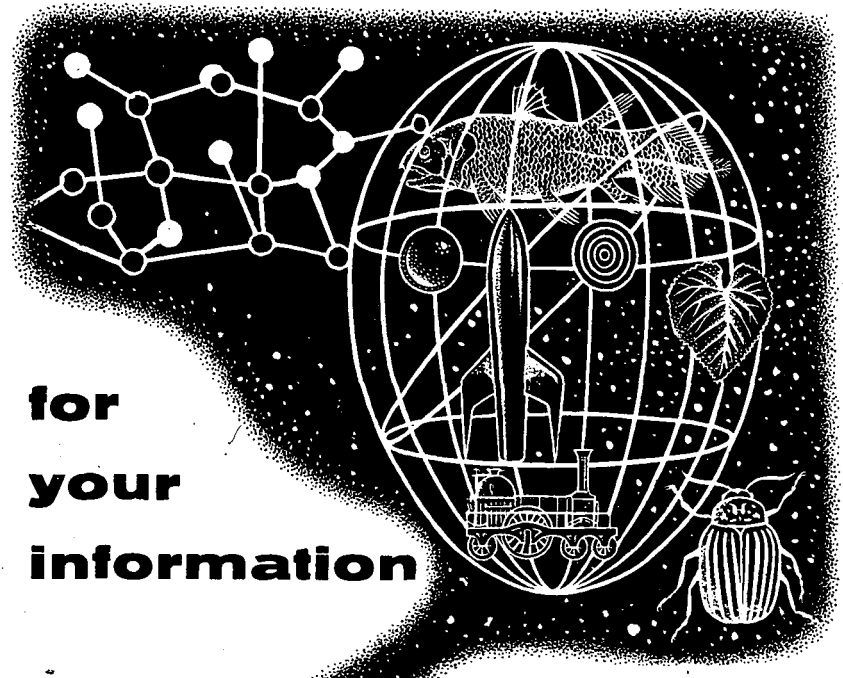


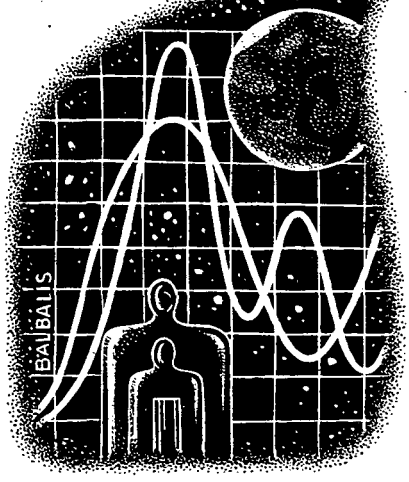
for your information

BY WILLY LEY

ARE WE GOING TO BUILD A SPACE STATION?

THE QUESTION that has been asked most frequently of me after seminars and lectures during the last five months or so was "Are we going to build a space station?" Or: "Has the space-station project been given up?" or even, "Do we still need a space station?"

At first I merely answered the question, asserting that a space station is still considered useful and that it will be built when the



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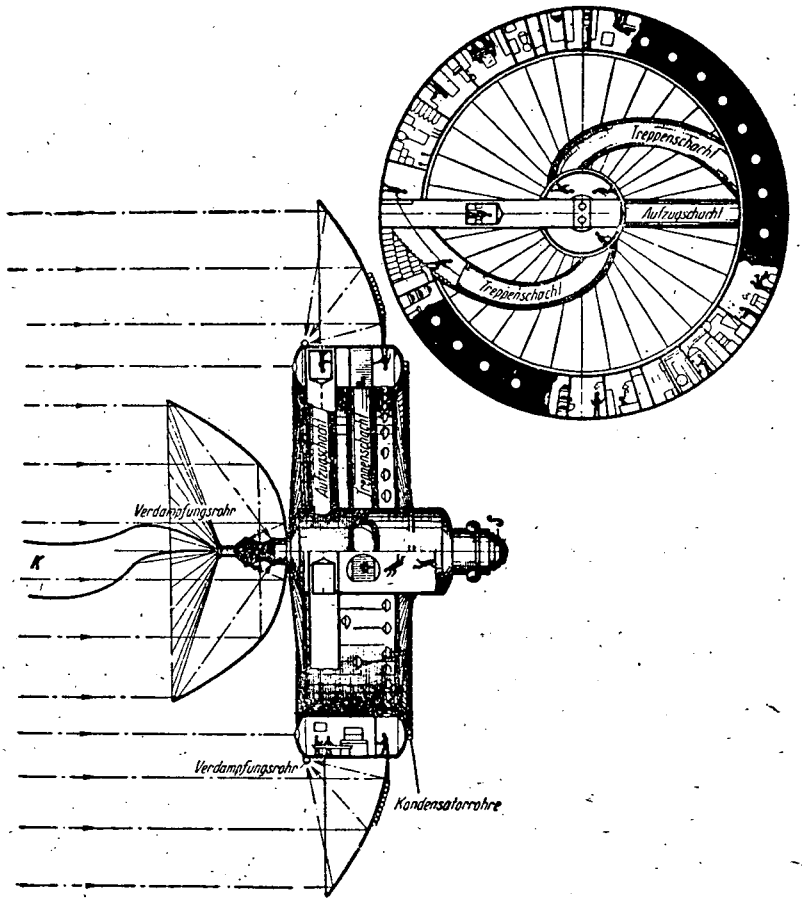

Fig. 1. Noordung's Space Station (1928)
The word **Treppenschacht** means "stairwell", **Aufzugschacht** means "elevator shaft", **Verdampfungsrohr** means "boiler tube" and **Kondensatorrohre** means "condenser tubes".

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time is ripe. After a while I began to wonder why this question came up with such monotonous regularity and I began to ask back.

It turned out that not everybody who asked that question had the same reasons. One would be motivated by the belief that rocket engineers had changed their plans and wanted to do everything with direct takeoff from Earth. Somebody else had swallowed the statement, made by some people, that "instruments are much lighter than men and can do things no man could do, like detecting X-rays." And others just read a meaning into what might be called an absence of publicity; since the newspapers and magazines had talked about nothing but boosters, instrumented satellites and Mercury capsules for more than a year, the space-station project had most likely been given up.

Of course it isn't so.

If NASA, and with it newspapers, magazines, radio and TV, is talking mainly about instrumented satellites and boosters and so forth, it is talking merely about the things now at hand. Instrumented satellites are being sent up at fairly regular rate. By December 31, 1961 there had been a total of 74 successful satellite shots (USA 61, USSR 13) and 5 shots to and past the moon (USA 2, USSR 3.) Orbital flights have been made by both sides and the program to make the big Saturn booster operational is under way. The space station is still a few years in the future. And before we can go ahead and build it a few other things have to be done first.

THERE are mainly two things that must be done before the space station project can become active. One is to have a large reliable booster, namely the Saturn. On its first test flight the Saturn, since all the upper stages were merely dummies, carried 190,000 pounds of water ballast —which gives a fine indication of what it can lift. As now planned, the Saturn will be able to put 20,000 pounds into a 300-mile orbit. But if the upper stages which are now under development should turn out a little better than expected — let's say, if they turn out as well as hoped — that payload may turn out to be ten per cent higher. This will take care of the necessary load-carrying capacity.

The second thing that must be done before the space station can be tackled is the solution of the so-called rendezvous problem. The space station, once it exists, cannot survive unless the rendezvous problem has been solved, even if the whole station was car-

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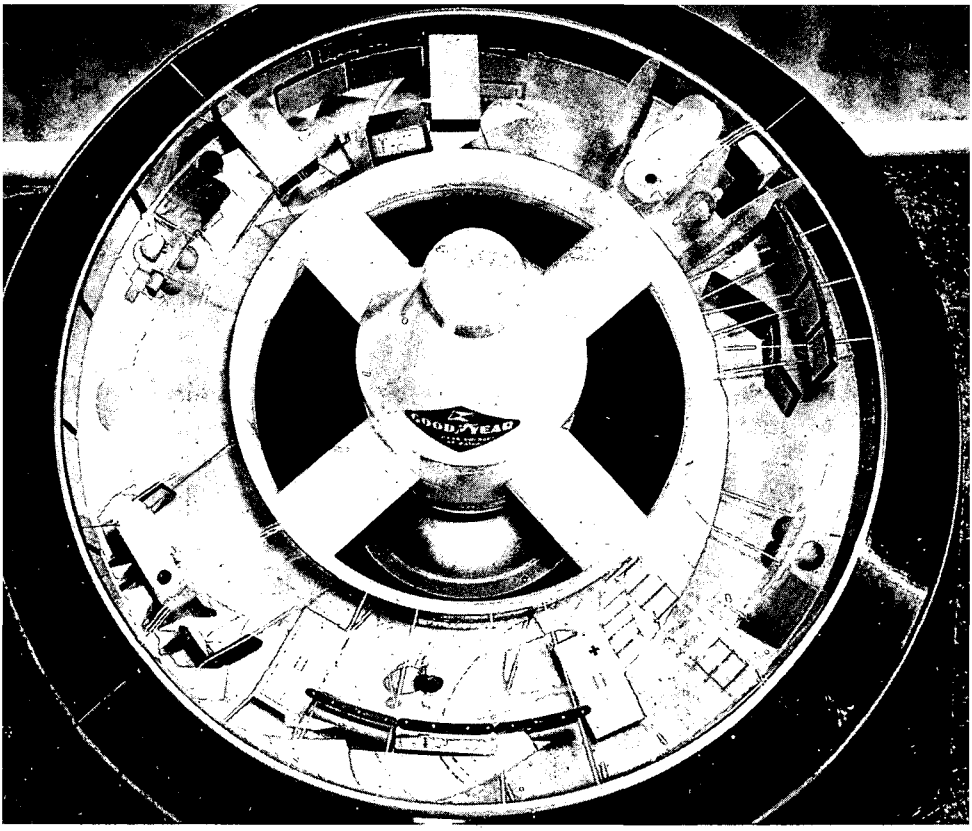

ried into orbit in one piece. A space station is, by definition, a manned satellite. The crew inside must be both relieved and supplied. Even if he had a rather small space station with a crew of only eight men in mind, these men must be relieved from time to time. Let us say that a stretch of duty would be six weeks; we need a supply ship which can carry four men plus supplies every three weeks.

The rendezvous problem, which is the physical contact between two vessels both of which are orbiting the earth, is going to be attacked during 1963. (At the moment of writing no date has been set.) But it is very likely that the Gemini capsule for two astronauts will play a role in the rendezvous problem.

The two unfinished items — the big booster for carrying heavy loads, and the rendezvous pro-

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gram, for equipping, supplying and maintaining the space station — are the reason why the space station isn't much in the news right now.

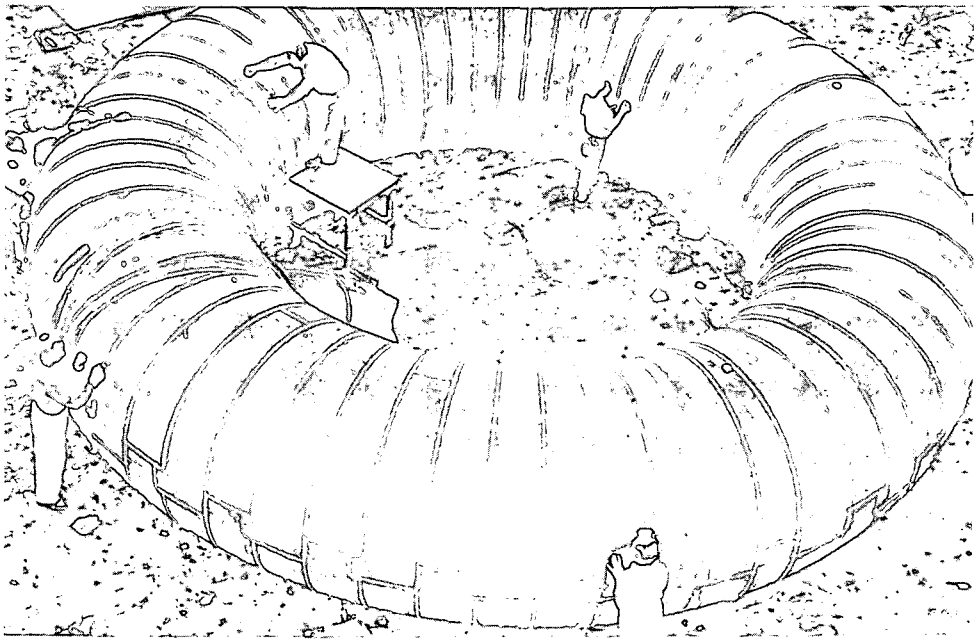
But that does not mean that nobody is thinking about it.

In fact we are now in the fourth phase of the thinking about the space station.

The first phase was way back in 1923, when Professor Hermann Oberth introduced the concept into scientific literature. He did not describe a specific space station, however; he only suggested how it might be done. His idea ran as follows: put a very large rocket ship equipped with a "landing boat" into an orbit around the earth. Have the man who put the ship into orbit return to the ground with his landing boat. And then add to the space station with successive flights, until it has become an orbital base.

The second phase followed five years later, when an Austrian retired officer, originally a captain

Fig. 3. 24-foot model of an expandable space station
(Courtesy Goodyear Aircraft Corp.)



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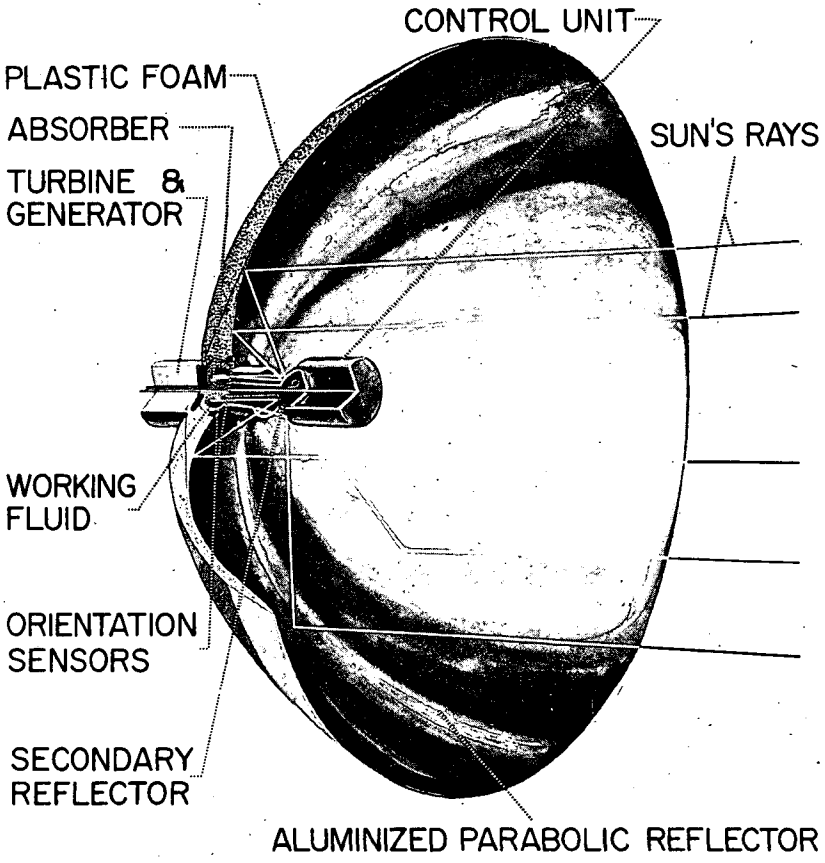

Fig. 4. A non-rigid solar collector with turbo-generator.
(Courtesy: Goodyear Aircraft Corp.)

in the Austrian army's Engineer Corps, published a book on space travel which was mainly devoted to a description of the space station as he conceived it. Captain Potôcnik, who wrote under the pen name of Hermann Noordung, had a three-body space station in mind. There were two auxiliary bodies, the astronomical observatory and the power house, and the main one which he called the

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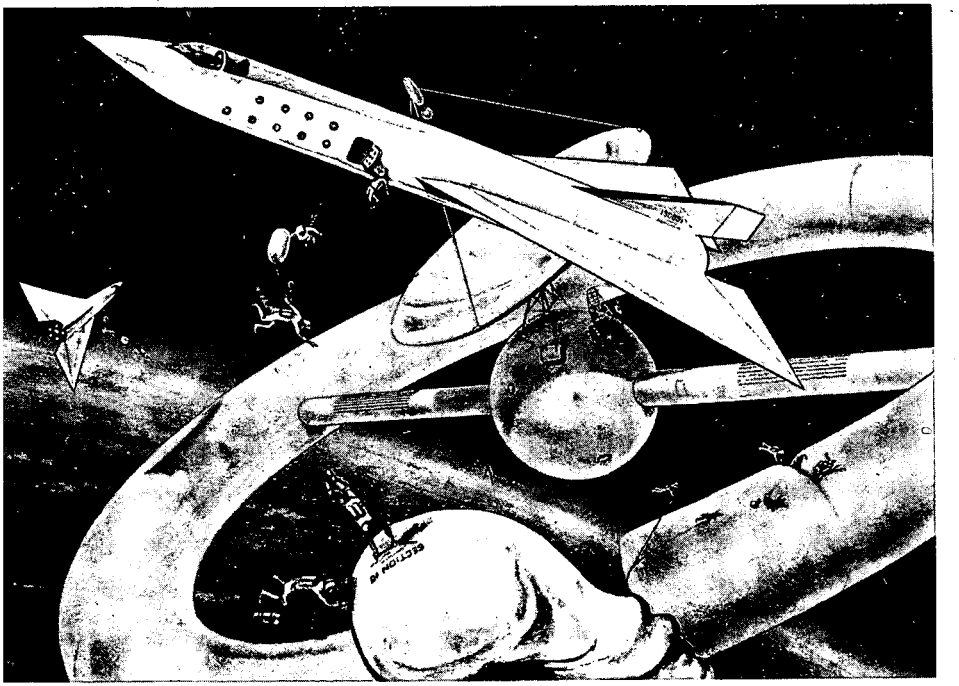
Wohnrad (Living Wheel). See Fig. 1. It was a circular structure with living quarters in its rim. Of course it was supposed to rotate so that the crew would be under pseudo-gravity (actually centrifugal force) and because it rotated the wheel was to be entered by the hub. Curved mirrors for catching the sun's rays were to provide power. "Hermann Noordung" did not think of everything, and he also made a number of mistakes, but his was the first design for a permanent space station and his main suggestions have been in all subsequent designs.

One interesting fact which might be useful to mention is that some of Noordung's concepts appeared in subsequent designs although the originators of these designs did not even know that his book existed. It just proves that solutions to given problems are bound to turn out to be similar.

Fig. 5 Building of a large expandable space station. The two delta-winged ships are re-entry vehicles.

(Courtesy: Goodyear Aircraft Corp.)



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THE third phase came in 1952, when *Collier's Weekly* decided to devote most of one issue to space travel.

The central theme of the issue was Wernher von Braun's space-station concept. One interesting result of the circumstances was that every one of the participating scientists was forced to think about things which he would normally have postponed. The scientific conference which *Collier's Weekly* had called at my suggestion had the primary purpose of producing something that the magazine could publish . . . which meant that many things that had been stated before in rather general terms had to be stated in definite terms for the purpose of being painted and described. I'll give just two examples: Wernher von Braun had stated earlier that the space station would derive the power needed by the concentration of solar radiation "fueling" a turbo-generator. Now he — or rather we, the conference — had to think of the shape and arrangement of the mirror so that Chesley Bonestell could paint it, and von Braun also had to make calculations so that the overall weight of the mirror and turbo-generator could be mentioned. I had stated (as had everybody else) that the crew of the space station would be relieved at intervals; now I had to think about a whole housekeeping schedule, from crew replacement to garbage removal, taking the assumed size of the station and the carrying capacity of von Braun's assumed cargo carriers as the starting point.

The final outcome of all the deliberations was a ring-shaped station with a circular trough-shaped mirror for collecting solar radiation. In these two respects it resembles Noordung's *Wohnrad,* but the concept contained many things that Noordung had never dreamed of. There was an automatic stabilizing system which operated by pumping water from one sector to another to offset the effects of crew members walking around. The skin of the station, automatically assumed to be metal by Noordung, had turned into a plastic, reinforced by nylon threads or stainless steel wires. This made it possible to collapse the sections for transporting them into orbit. In addition to general refinement, a sheet-metal "meteor bumper" had been added to absorb the impact of micro-meteorites.

The fourth phase is now.

Now big rockets no longer need to be assumed, they exist. While the date of the first experimental space station is still in the future it is now a near future of less than half a dozen years. And now industry is thinking about

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the problem. One might say that the thinkers are no longer people of a theoretical bent who point out what should be possible. The thinkers are people who hope for a contract.

Of course there are several designs around in the United States and there can be little doubt that there are similar designs around in the Soviet Union. Some of the current designs visualize a structure similar to that of a Zeppelin-type airship, consisting of circular girder type rings for the end of each section, spaced apart by lightweight metal beams. The airtight plastic cover is then to be draped over this metallic skeleton. But Goodyear Aircraft has evolved another design, one which seems an echo of the other type of lighter-than-airship we once had, the blimp.

I FEEL a rather remote personal interest in structures of this type, one which needs some backtracking in time to explain. One of my earliest memories is seeing one of the airships built by Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin circling over Berlin. A few years later I was taken out to a remote suburb to see an airship on the ground. It was one that also bore the name of its designer: Major Parseval. Many years later I was one of the men who founded the rocket-proving ground in a nearby suburb of Berlin.

It took me over a year to realize that the remote suburb of my childhood and the nearby suburb of my early manhood were one and the same, and that we were building our early liquid fuel rockets in a corner of the tract of fields and copses which had served Major Parseval. By that time I had also learned to what extremes Major Parseval had gone in his design.

In a desire to produce an airship which could be loaded on a truck (and the trucks of that period were not very large) he had not only done without a skeleton, he had not only designed and built a collapsible gondola, he had even produced collapsible propellers. His propellers were strips of cloth attached to a hub. Their ends were curved pieces of steel, so that the propeller acquired its shape by the centrifugal force of these curved steel pieces, when the engine spun the propeller. (The only thing Major Parseval could not collapse, although he probably tried, was the engine.)

I was reminded of all this by seeing that Goodyear's space station is not only completely collapsible — they call it "expandable" — but that even their solar reflectors are not rigid!

The reason why these struc-

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tures are called "expandable" instead of collapsible is that, at least in one version, they cannot be collapsed again once they have been expanded. The design works with quick-setting plastic foam which will be injected into the space between an inner and outer skin. Or else there may be hose-like "stiffeners".

Work on a model of this type is now going on.

Indubitably there will be changes as experimentation progresses. There might even be changes in concept in some areas of the design. If, for example, during the next two years — while the Saturn is proved out as reliable and a rendezvous technique is being evolved — an atomic reactor of high energy output, light overall weight and proven reliability is developed, the time-honored solar collector and turbo-generator system may be abandoned. But only if, kilowatt-hour for kilowatt-hour, the atomic reactor is considerably lighter. If it is only a little lighter the consideration that solar radiation comes free of charge while heavy isotopes cost money will still win out.

The first experimental space station is likely to be rather small. But a larger one is in the future.

The concept of the space station has not been given up.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If "perigee" means the point of an orbit closest to Earth and "perihelion" means the point of an orbit closest to the sun (with "apogee" and "aphelion" being their opposites) what words should one use for the point closest to another planet?

Selma Felicitas Montez
Regina Nubili, Argentina

When I taught at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey I used to say that my best students were married women who went to college because they wanted to, not because father said so. I'll now amend this statement to say that female students have a talent for asking especially difficult questions.

When Johannes Kepler coined the word perihelion, etc., he used the Greek name (*Helios*) of the sun, not the Latin (*Sol*) or the German (*Sonne*); likewise for Earth he used the Greek *gaia* instead of the Latin *terra*. Now, after mulling over this letter, and even calling on friends for help, I know why. If you try to do it with the Latin names you get rather clumsy constructions. Before I go into the problem let me say that "perigee" should really be peri-gaion, and in some languages this form, or one close to it, is used. Likewise the term

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peri-astron (from Greek *aster* for star) for closest approach to a star, for example by a comet, is astronomical usage. Of course the term is rarely used. The concept is not needed often.

Now let's go to work.

If you use the Greek name for Mercury, Hermeias, you get a reasonable word for the equivalents of perigee and aprogee, namely peri-hermeion and apo-hermeion. The latter might be contracted to aphermeion, following the example of aphelion for apo-helion. The next planet, Venus, is a little more of a problem. Using the Latin name Venus always works out clumsily in English, partly because "of Venus" is *veneris* which is misleading, to say the least. But we have a choice of classical names for Venus. One of them is Hesperos which would produce peri-hesperon and apo-hesperon. Again the latter might be contracted into aphesperon.

Our own moon poses a problem which is not only linguistically troublesome but fairly urgent. We'll need these terms soon! The Latin name is, course, Luna, the Greek is Selene (*three* syllables, please!) and the better choice again seems to be the Greek, giving us peri-seleneion (peri-selenon) and apo-seleneion (apo-selenon.) Mars (Greek: Ares) presents no difficulties. The terms would be peri-areion (peri-areon) and apo-areion (apo-areon.)

As for the outer planets the terms may sound somewhat clumsy but do not present any special difficulties. For Saturn the Latin name works out better, e. g. peri-saturnium. Uranus is Greek to begin with and the Greek ending would be preferable since the Latin form would be peri-uranium which might cause misunderstandings. In the case of Neptune one could use this Latin form, or else go to the Greek equivalent Poseidon.

The reason I left out Jupiter is threefold. Neither the Latin Jupiter nor the Greek equivalent Zenus produce very elegant terms. Moreover, because of work on the orbits of Jupiter's numerous moons, a term for the closest approach is already being used. It is perijove, hardly pretty but, under the circumstances, the least of three possible evils.

In reality future astronauts will probably say "my closest approach was so and so many miles." Or else, since on a chart the closest approach is always designated by the Greek letter *pi,* they may avoid words like peri-kythereion by saying that they are approaching the *pi* position.

— WILLY LEY

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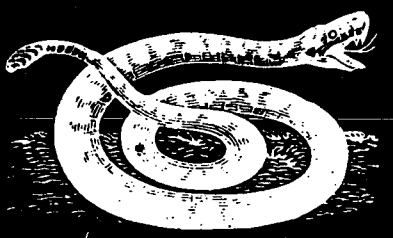
The world was smashed like a spoiled child's plaything — now Chandler was in the very presence of the destroyers!

By FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated by RITTER

PLAGUE OF PYTHONS



CONCLUSION

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On Christmas the world's freedom died. Every man, woman and child lay in the grip of fear, for no one knew at what moment his nearest friend or a casual stranger might suddenly be possessed by some brutal mind . . . and begin to murder and destroy. For Chandler it was worse than for most. He was both victim and executioner. He had suffered himself, and he had committed a violent crime while under the strange domination. Accusing of hoaxing he was driven from his home. He wandered until he found himself in Hawaii and learned that this was the center of the plague — and that he was helpless to do anything about it!

VII

A PINK and silver bus let Chandler off at Fort Street in downtown Honolulu and he walked a few blocks to the address he had been given. The name of the place was Parts 'n Plenty. He found it easily enough. It was a radio parts store; by the size of it, it had once been a big, well-stocked one; but now the counters were almost bare.

A thin-faced man with khaki-colored skin looked up and nodded. Chandler nodded back. He fingered a bin of tuning knobs, hefted a coil of two-strand antenna wire and said, "A fellow at Tripler told me to come here to pick up equipment, but I'm damned if I know what I'm supposed to do when I locate it. I don't have any money."

The dark-skinned man got up and came over to him. "Figured you for a mainlander. No sweat. Have you got a list?"

"I can make one."

"All right. Catalogues on the table behind you, if you want them." He offered Chandler a cigarette and sat against the edge of the counter, reading over Chandler's shoulder. "Ho," he said suddenly. "Koitska's square-wave generator again, right?" Chandler admitted it, and the man grinned. "Every couple

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months he sends somebody along. He doesn't really need the generator, you know. He just wants to see how much you know about building it, Mr. — ?"

"Chandler."

"Glad to know you. I'm John Hsi. But don't go easy on the job just because it's a waste of time, Chandler; it could be pretty important to you."

Chandler absorbed the information silently and handed over his list. The man did not look at it. "Come back in about an hour," he said.

"I won't have any money in an hour, either."

"Oh, that's all right. I'll put it on Koitska's bill."

Chandler said frankly, "Look, I don't know what's going on. Suppose I came in and picked up a thousand dollars worth of stuff, would you put that on the bill, too?"

"Certainly," said Hsi optimistically. "You thinking about stealing them? What would you do with them?"

"Well . . ." Chandler puffed on his cigarette. "Well, I could—"

"No, you couldn't. Also, it wouldn't pay, believe me," Hsi said seriously. "If there is one thing that doesn't pay, it is cheating on the Exec."

"Now, that's another good question," said Chandler. "Who is the Exec?"

Hsi shook his head. "Sorry. I don't know you, Chandler."

"You mean you're afraid even to answer a question?"

"You're damned well told I am. Probably nobody would mind what I might tell you . . . but 'probably' isn't good enough."

Exasperated, Chandler said, "How the devil am I supposed to know what to do next? So I take all this junk back to my room at Tripler and solder up the generator — then what?"

"Then Koitska will get in touch with you," Hsi said, not unkindly. "Play it as it comes to you, Chandler, that's the best advice I can offer." He hesitated. "Koitska's not the worst of them," he said; and then, daringly, "and maybe he's not the best, either. Just do whatever he told you. Keep on doing it until he tells you to do something else. That's all. I mean, that's all the advice I can give you. Whether it's going to be enough to satisfy Koitska is something else again."

THERE is not much to do in a strange town when you have no money. Chandler's room at what once had been Tripler General Hospital was free; the bus was free; evidently all the radio parts he could want were also free. But he did not have the price of a cup of coffee or a haircut in the pockets of the suntan

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slacks the desk man at Tripler had issued him. He wandered around the streets of Honolulu, waiting for the hour to be up.

At Tripler a doctor had also examined his scar and it was now concealed under a neat white bandage; he had been fed; he had bathed; he had been given new clothes. Tripler was a teeming metropolis in itself, a main building some ten stories high, a scattering of outbuildings connected to it by covered passages, with thousands of men and women busy about it. Chandler had spoken to a good many of them in the hour after waking up and before boarding the bus to Honolulu, and none of them had been free with information either.

Honolulu had not suffered greatly under the rule of the Exec. Remembering the shattered stateside cities, Chandler thought that this one had been spared nearly all the suffering of the rule of the world by the Exec, whoever they were. Dawdling down King Street, in the aromatic reek of the fish markets, Chandler could have thought himself in any port city before the grisly events of that Christmas when the planet went possessed. Crabs waved sluggishly at him from bins. Great pink-scaled fish rested on nests of ice, waiting to be sold. Smells of frying food came from half a dozen restaurants. It was only the people who were different. There was a solid sprinkling of those who, like himself, were dressed in insigneless former Army uniforms — obviously conscripts on Exec errands — and a surprising minority who, from overheard snatches of conversation, had come from countries other than the U.S.A. Russian mostly, Chandler guessed; but Russian or U.S., wearing suntans or aloha shirts, everyone he saw was marked by the visible signs of strain. There was no laughter.

Chandler saw a clock within the door of a restaurant; half an hour still to kill. He turned and wandered up, away from the water, toward the visible bulk of the hills; and in a moment he saw what made Honolulu's collective face wear its careworn frown.

It was an open square — perhaps it had once been a war memorial — and in the center of it was a fenced-off paved area where people seemed to be resting. It struck Chandler as curious that so many persons should have decided to take a nap on what surely was an uncomfortable bed of flat concrete; he approached and saw that they were not resting. Not only his eyes but his ears conveyed the message — and his nose, too, for the mild air was fetid with blood and rot.

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These were not sleeping men and women. Some were dead; some were unconscious; all were maimed. The pavement was slimed with their blood. None had the strength to scream, but several were moaning and even some of the unconscious ones gasped like the breathing of a man in diabetic coma. Passersby walked briskly around the metal fence, and if their glances were curious it was at Chandler they looked, not at the tortured wrecks before them. He understood that the sight of the dying men and women was familiar — was painful — and thus was ignored; it was himself who was the curiosity, for staring at them. He turned and fled, trying not to vomit.

HE WAS still shaken when he returned to Parts 'n Plenty.

The hour was up but Hsi shook his head. "Not yet. You can sit down over there if you like." Chandler slumped into the indicated swivel chair and stared blankly at the wall. This was far worse than anything he had seen stateside. The random terror of murders and bombs was at least a momentary thing, and when it was done it was done. This was sustained torture. He buried his head in his hands and did not look up until he heard the sound of a door opening.

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Hsi, his face somehow different, was manipulating a lever on the outside of a door while a man inside, becoming visible as the door opened, was doing the same from within. It looked as though the lock on the door would not work unless both levers operated; and the man on the inside, whom Chandler had not seen before, was dressed, oddly, only in bathing trunks. His face wore the same expression as Hsi's. Chandler guessed (with practice it was becoming easy!) that both were possessed.

The man inside wheeled out two shopping carts loaded with electronic equipment of varying kinds, wordlessly received some empty ones from Hsi; and the door closed on him again.

Hsi tugged the lever down, turned, blinked and said, "All right, Chandler. Your stuff's here."

Chandler approached. "What was that all about?"

"Go to hell!" Hsi said with sudden violence. "I — Oh never mind. Sorry. But I told you already, ask somebody else your questions, not me." He gloomily began to pack the items on Chandler's list into a cardboard carton. Then he glanced at Chandler and said, apologetically, "These are tough times, buddy. I guess there's no harm in answering *some* questions. You want to

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know why most of my stock's locked behind an armor-plate door? Well, you ought to be able to figure that out for yourself, anyway. The Exec doesn't like to have people playing with radios. Bert stays in the stockroom; I stay out here; twice a day the bosses open the door and we fill whatever orders they've approved. A little rough on Bert, of course. It's a ten-hour day in the stockroom for him, and nothing to do. But it could be worse. Oh, that's for sure, friend: It could be worse."

"Why the bathing suit? Hot in there?"

"Hot for Bert if they think he's smuggling stuff out," said Hsi. "You been here long enough to see the Monument yet?"

Chandler shook his head, then grimaced. "You mean up about three blocks that way? Where the people — ?"

"That's right," said Hsi admiringly, "three blocks mauka from here, where the people — Where the people are serving as a very good object lesson to you and me. About a dozen there, right? Small for this time of year, Chandler. Usually there are more. Notice anything special about them?"

"They were butchered! Some of them looked like their legs had been burned right off. Their eyes gouged out, their faces —" Chandler brought up sharply. It had been bad enough looking at those wretched, writhing semi-cadavers; he did not want to talk about them.

The parts man nodded seriously. "Sometimes there are more, and sometimes they're worse hurt than that. Have you got any idea how they get that way? They do it to themselves, that's how. My own brother was out there for a week, last Statehood Day. He jumped feet first into a concrete mixer, and it took him seven days to die after I put him on my shoulder and carried him out there. I didn't like it, of course, but I didn't exactly have any choice; I wasn't running my own body at the time. Neither was he when he jumped. He was made to do it, because he used to have Bert's job and he thought he'd take a little short-wave set home. Like I said, you don't want to cheat on the Exec because it doesn't pay."

"But what the devil am I supposed to —"

Hsi held up his hand. "Don't ask me how to keep out of that Monument bunch, Chandler. *I* don't know. Do what you're told and don't do anything you aren't told to do; that is the whole of the law. Now do me a favor and get out of here so I can pack up these other orders." He turned his back on Chandler.

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VIII

BY THE morning of the fourth day on the island of Oahu Chandler had learned enough of the ropes to have signed a money-chit at the Tripler currency office against Koitska's account.

That was about all he had learned, except for a few practical matters like where meals were served and the location of the fresh-water swimming pool at the back of the grounds. He was killing time using the pool when, in the middle of a jacknife from the ten-foot board, he felt himself seized. He sprawled into the water with a hard splashing slap, threshed about and, as he came to the surface, found himself giggling.

"Sorry, dear," he apologized to himself, "but we don't carry our weight in the same places, you know. Get that square-what'sit thingamajig, like an angel, and meet me in front by the flagpole in twenty minutes."

He recognized the voice, even if his own vocal chords had made it. It was the girl who had driven him back from the interview with Koitska, the one who had casually announced she had saved his life at his hoaxing trial. Chandler swam to the side of the pool and toweled as he trotted toward his quarters. She was from Koitska now, of course; which meant that his "test" was about to be graded.

Quickly though he dressed, she was there before him, standing beside a low-slung sports car and chatting with one of the groundskeepers. An armful of leis dangled beside her, and although she wore the coronet which was evidence of her status the gardener did not seem to fear her. "Come along, love," she called to Chandler. "Koitska wants your thingummy. Chuck it in the trunk if it'll fit, and we'll head waikiki wikiwiki. Don't I say that nicely? But I only fool the malihinis, like you."

She chattered away as the little car dug its rear wheels into the drive and leaped around the green and out the gate.

The wind howled by them, the sun was bright, the sky was piercingly blue. Riding next to this beautiful girl, it was hard for Chandler to remember that she was one of those who had destroyed his world. It was a terrible thing to have so much hatred and to feel it so diluted. Not even Koitska seemed a terrible enough enemy to accept such a load of detestation; it was hate without an object, and it recoiled on the hater, leaving him turgid and constrained. If he could not hate his onetime friend Jack Souther for defiling and destroying his wife, it was almost

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as hard to hate Souther's anonymous possessor. It could even have been Koitska. It could even have been this girl by his side. In the strange, cruel fantasies with which the Execs indulged themselves it was likely enough that they would sometimes assume the body, and the role, of the opposite sex. Why not? Strange, ruthless morality; it was impossible to evaluate it by any human standards.

It was also impossible to think of hatred with her beside him. They soared around Honolulu on a broad expressway and paralleled the beach toward Waikiki. "Look, dear. Diamond Head! Mustn't ignore it — very bad form — like not going to see the night-blooming cereus at the Punahou School. You haven't missed that, have you?"

"I'm afraid I have—"

"Rosalie. Call me Rosalie, dear."

"I'm afraid I have, Rosalie." For some reason the name sounded familiar.

"Shame, oh, shame! They say it was wonderful night before last. Looks like cactus to me, but —"

Chandler's mental processes had worked to a conclusion. "Rosalie *Pan!*" he said. "Now I know!"

"Know what? You mean —" she swerved around a motionless Buick, parked arrogantly five feet from the curb — "you mean you didn't know who I was? And to think I used to pay five thousand a year for publicity."

Chandler said, smiling, and almost relaxed, "I'm sorry, but musical comedies weren't my strong point. I did see you once, though, on television. Then, let's see, wasn't there something about you disappearing —"

She nodded, glancing at him. "There sure was, dear. I almost froze to death getting out to that airport. Of course, it was worth it, I found out later. If I hadn't been took, as they say, I would've been dead, because you remember what happened to New York about an hour later."

"You must have had some friends," Chandler began, and let it trail off. So did the girl. After a moment she began to talk about the scenery again, pointing out the brick-red and purple bougainvillea, describing how the shoreline had looked before they'd "cleaned it up." "Oh, thousands and thousands of the *homeliest* little houses. You'd have hated it. So we have done at least a few good things, anyway," she said complacently, and began gently to probe into his life story. But as they stopped before the TWA message center, a few moments later, she said, "Well, love, it's been fun. Go on in; Koitska's expecting you. I'll see you later."

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And her eyes added gently: *I hope.*

CHANDLER got out of the car, turned . . . and felt himself taken. His voice said briskly, *"Zdrastvoi, Rosie. Gd'yeh Koitska?"*

Unsurprised the girl pointed to the building. *"Kto govorit?"*

Chandler's voice answered in English, with a faint Oxford accent: "It is I, Rosie, Kalman. Where's Koitska's tinkertoy? Oh, all right, thanks; I'll just pick it up and take it in. Hope it's all right. I must say one wearies of breaking in these new fellows."

Chandler's body ambled around to the trunk of the car, took out the square-wave generator on its breadboard base and slouched into the building. It called ahead in the same language and was answered wheezily from above: Koitska. *"Zdrastvoi. Iditye suda ko mneh. Kto, Kalman?"*

"Konyekhno!" cried Chandler's voice and he was carried in and up to where the fat man lounged in a leather-upholstered wheelchair. There was a conversation, long minutes of it, while the two men poked at the generator. Chandler did not understand a word until he spoke to himself: "You — what's your name."

"Chandler," Koitska filled in.

"You, Chandler. D'you know anything at all about submillimeter microwaves? Tell Koitska." Briefly Chandler felt himself free — long enough to nod; then he was possessed again, and Koitska repeated the nod. "Good, then. Tell Koitska what experience you've had."

Again free, Chandler said, "Not a great deal of actual experience. I worked with a group at Caltech on spectroscopic measurements in the million megacycle range. I didn't design any of the equipment, though I helped put it together." He recited his degrees until Koitska raised a languid hand.

"*Shto*, I don't care. If ve gave you diagrams you could build?"

"Certainly, if I had the equipment. I suppose I'd need —"

But Koitska stopped him again. "I know vot you need," he said damply. "Enough. Ve see." In a moment Chandler was taken again, and his voice and Koitska's debated the matter for a while, until Koitska shrugged, turned his head and seemed to go to sleep.

Chandler marched himself out of the room and out into the driveway before his voice said to him: "You've secured a position, then. Go back to Tripler until we send for you. It'll be a few days, I expect."

And Chandler was free again.

He was also alone. The girl in the Porsche was gone. The door

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of the TWA building had latched itself behind him. He stared around him, swore, shrugged and circled the building to the parking lot at back, on the chance that a car might be there for him to borrow.

Luckily, there was. There were four, in fact, all with keys in them. He selected a Ford, puzzled out the likeliest road back to Honolulu and turned the key in the starter.

It was fortunate, he thought, that there had been several cars; if there had been only one he would not have dared to take it, for fear of stranding Koitska or some other exec who might easily blot him out in annoyance. He did not wish to join the wretches at the Monument.

It was astonishing how readily fear had become a part of his life.

The trouble with this position he had somehow secured — one of the troubles — was that there was no union delegate to settle employee grievances. Like no transportation. Like no clear idea of working hours, or duties. Like no mention at all — of course — of wages. Chandler had no idea what his rights were, if any at all, or of what the penalties would be if he overstepped them.

The maimed victims at the Monument supplied a clue, of course. He could not really believe that that sort of punishment would be applied for minor infractions. Death was so much less trouble. Even death was not really likely, he thought, for a simple lapse.

He *thought*.

He could not be sure, of course. He could be sure of only one thing: He was now a slave, completely a slave, a slave until the day he died. Back on the mainland there was the statistical likelihood of occasional slavery-by-possssion, but there it was only the body that was enslaved, and only for moments. Here, in the shadow of the execs, it was all of him, forever, until death or a miracle turned him loose.

ON THE second day following he returned to his room at Tripler after breakfast, and found a Honolulu city policeman sitting hollow-eyed on the edge of his bed. The man stood up as Chandler came in. "So," he grumbled, "you take so long! Here. Is diagrams, specs, parts lists, all. You get everything three days from now, then we begin."

The policeman, no longer Koitska, shook himself, glanced stolidly at Chandler and walked out, leaving a thick manila envelope on the pillow. On it was written, in a crabbed hand: *All secret! Do not show diagrams!*

Chandler opened the envelope

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and spilled its contents on the bed.

An hour later he realized that sixty minutes had passed in which he had not been afraid. It was good to be working again, he thought, and then that thought faded away again as he returned to studying the sheaves of circuit diagrams and closely typed pages of specifications. It was not only work, it was hard work, and absorbing. Chandler knew enough about the very short wavelength radio spectrum to know that the device he was supposed to build was no proficiency test; this was for real. The more he puzzled over it the less he could understand of its purpose. There was a transmitter and there was a receiver. Astonishingly, neither was directional: that ruled out radar, for example. He rejected immediately the thought that the radiation was for spectrum analysis, as in the Caltech project — unfortunate, because that was the only application with which he had first-hand familiarity; but impossible. The thing was too complicated. Nor could it be a simple message transmitter—no, perhaps it could, assuming there was a reason for using the submillimeter bands instead of the conventional, far simpler short-wave spectrum. Could it? The submillimeter waves were line-of-sight, of course, but would ionosphere scatter make it possible for them to cover great distances? He could not remember. Or was that irrelevant, since perhaps they needed only to cover the distances between islands in their own archipelago? But then, why all the power? And in any case, what about this fantastic switching panel, hundreds of square feet of it even though it was transistorized and subminiaturized and involving at least a dozen sophisticated technical refinements he hadn't the training quite to understand? AT&T could have handled every phone call in the United States with less switching than this—in the days when telephone systems spanned a nation instead of a fraction of a city. He pushed the papers together in a pile and sat back, smoking a cigarette, trying to remember what he could of the theory behind submillimeter radiation.

At half a million megacycles and up, the domain of quantum theory began to be invaded. Rotating gas molecules, constricted to a few energy states, responded directly to the radio waves. Chandler remembered late-night bull sessions in Pasadena during which it had been pointed out that the possibilities in the field were enormous — although only possibilities, for there was no engineering way to reach them, and

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no clear theory to point the way — suggesting such strange ultimate practical applications as the receiverless radio, for example. Was that what he had here?

He gave up. It was a question that would burn at him until he found the answer, but just now he had work to do, and he'd better be doing it.

Skipping lunch entirely, he carefully checked the components lists, made a copy of what he would need, checked the original envelope and its contents with the man at the main receiving desk for his safe, and caught the bus to Honolulu.

At the Parts 'n Plenty store, Hsi read the list with a faint frown that turned into a puzzled scowl. When he put it down he looked at Chandler for a few moments without speaking.

"Well, Hsi? Can you get all this for me?" The parts man shrugged and nodded. "Koitska said in three days."

Hsi looked startled, then resigned. "That puts it right up to me, doesn't it? All right. Wait a moment."

He disappeared in the back of the store, where Chandler heard him talking on what was evidently an intercom system. He came back in a few minutes and slipped Chandler's list into a slit in the locked door. "Tough for Bert," he said. "He'll be working all night, getting started — but I can take it easy till tomorrow. By then he'll know what we don't have, and I'll find some way to get it." He shrugged again, but his face was lined. Chandler wondered how one went about finding, for example, a thirty megawatt klystron tube; but it was Hsi's problem. He said:

"All right, I'll see you Monday."

"Wait a minute, Chandler." Hsi eyed him. "You don't have anything special to do, do you? Well, come have dinner with me. Maybe I can get to know you. Then maybe I can answer some of your questions, if you like."

THEY TOOK a bus out Kapiolani Boulevard, then got out and walked a few blocks to a restaurant named Mother Chee's. Hsi was well known there, it seemed. He led Chandler to a booth at the back, nodded to the waiter, ordered without looking at the menu and sat back. "You malihinis don't know much about food," he said, humorously patronizing. "I think you'll like it. It's all fish, anyway."

The man was annoying. Chandler was moved to say, "Too bad, I was hoping for duck in orange sauce, perhaps some snow peas —"

Hsi shook his head. "There's

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meat, all right, but not here. You'll only find it in the places where the execs sometimes go . . . Tell me something, Chandler. What's that scar on your forehead."

Chandler touched it, almost with surprise. Since the medics had treated it he had almost forgotten it was there. He began to explain, then paused, looking at Hsi, and changed his mind. "What's the score? You testing me, too? Want to see if I'll lie about it?"

Hsi grinned. "Sorry. I guess that's what I was doing. I do know what an 'H' stands for; we've seen them before. Not many. The ones that do get this far usually don't last long. Unless, of course, they are working for somebody whom it wouldn't do to offend," he explained.

"So what you want to know, then, is whether I was really hoaxing or not. Does it make any difference?"

"Damn right it does, man! We're slaves, but we're not animals!" Chandler had gotten to him; the parts man looked startled, then sallow, as he observed his own vehemence.

"Sorry, Hsi. It makes a difference to me, too. Well, I wasn't hoaxing. I was possessed, just like any other everyday rapist-murderer, only I couldn't prove it. And it didn't look too good for me, because the damn thing happened in a pharmaceuticals plant. That was supposed to be about the only place in town where you could be sure you wouldn't be possessed, or so everybody thought. Including me. Up to the time I went ape."

Hsi nodded. The waiter approached with their drinks. Hsi looked at him appraisingly, then did a curious thing. He gripped his left wrist with his right hand, quickly, then released it again. The waiter did not appear to notice. Expertly he served the drinks, folded small pink floral napkins, dumped and wiped their ashtray in one motion — and then, so quickly that Chandler was not quite sure he had seen it, caught Hsi's wrist in the same fleeting gesture just before he turned and walked away.

Without comment Hsi turned back to Chandler. He said, "I believe you. Would you like to know why it happened? Because I think I can tell you. The execs have all the antibiotics they need now."

"You mean —" Chandler hesitated.

"That's right. They did leave some areas alone, as long as they weren't fully stocked on everything they might want for the foreseeable future. Wouldn't you?"

"I might," Chandler said cau-

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tiously, "if I knew what I was — being an exec."

Hsi said, "Eat your dinner. I'll take a chance and tell you what I know." He swallowed his whiskey-on-the-rocks with a quick backward jerk of the head. "They're mostly Russians — you must know that much for yourself. The whole thing started in Russia."

Chandler said, "Well, that's pretty obvious. But Russia was smashed up as much as anywhere else. The whole Russian government was killed — wasn't it?"

Hsi nodded. "They're not the government. Not the exec. Communism doesn't mean any more to them than the Declaration of Independence does — which is nothing. It's very simple, Chandler: they're a project that got out of hand."

BACK four years ago, he said, in Russia, it started in the last days of the Second Stalinite Regime, before the Neo-Krushchevists took over power in the January Push.

The Western World had not known exactly what was going on, of course. The "mystery wrapped in a riddle surrounded by an enigma" had become queerer and even more opaque after Kruschchev's death and the revival of such fine old Soviet institutions as the Gay Pay Oo. That was the development called the Freeze, when the Stalinites seized control in the name of the sacred Generalissimo of the Soviet Fatherland, a mighty-missile party, dedicated to bringing about the world revolution by force of sputnik. The neo-Krushchevists, on the other hand, believed that honey caught more flies than vinegar; and, although there were few visible adherents to that philosophy during the purges of the Freeze, they were not all dead. Then, out of the Donbas Electrical Workshop, came sudden support for their point of view.

It was a weapon. It was more than a weapon, an irresistable tool — more than that, the way to end all disputes forever. It was a simple radio transmitter (Hsi said) — or so it seemed, but its frequencies were on an unusual band and its effects were remarkable. It controlled the minds of men. The "receiver" was the human brain. Through this little portable transmitter, surgically patch-wired to the brain of the person operating it, his entire personality was transmitted in a pattern of very short waves which could invade and modulate the personality of any other human being in the world. For that matter, of any animal, as long as the creature had enough "mind" to seize —

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"What's the matter?" Hsi interrupted himself, staring at Chandler. Chandler had stopped eating, his hand frozen midway to his mouth. He shook his head.

"Nothing. Go on." Hsi shrugged and continued.

While the Western World was celebrating Christmas — the Christmas before the first outbreak of possession in the outside world — the man who invented the machine was secretly demonstrating it to another man. Both of them were now dead. The inventor had been a Pole, the other man a former Party leader who, four years before, had rescued the inventor's dying father from a Siberian work camp. The Party leader had reason to congratulate himself on that loaf cast on the water. There were only three working models of the transmitter — what ultimately was refined into the coronet Chandler had seen on the heads of Koitska and the girl — but that was enough for the January push.

The Stalinites were out. The neo-Krushchevists were in.

A whole factory in the Donbas was converted to manufacturing these little mental controllers as fast as they could be produced — and that was fast, for they were simple in design to begin with and were quickly refined to a few circuits. Even the surgical wiring tc the brain became unnecessary as induction coils tapped the encephalic rhythms. Only the great amplifying hookup was really complicated. Only one of those was necessary, for a single amplifier could serve as rebroadcaster — modulator for thousands of the headsets.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Hsi demanded.

Chandler put down his fork, lit a cigarette and beckoned to the waiter. "I'm all right. I just want another drink."

He needed the drink. For now he knew what he was building for Koitska.

THE waiter brought two more drinks and carried away the uneaten food. "We don't know exactly who did what after that," Hsi said, "but somehow or other it got out of hand. I think it was the technical crew of the factory that took over. I suppose it was an inevitable danger." He grinned savagely. "I can just imagine the Party workers in the factory," he said, "trying to figure out how to keep them in line — bribe them or terrify them? Give them dachas or send a quota to Siberia? Neither would work, of course, because there isn't any bribe you can give to a man who only has to stretch out his hand to take over the world, and you can't frighten a man who can make you slit your own throat. Any-

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way, the next thing that happened — the following Christmas — was when they took over the world. It wasn't a Party movement at all any more. A lot of the workers were Czechs and Hungarians and Poles, and the first thing they wanted to was to even a few scores.

"So here they are! Before they let the whole world go bang they got out of range. They got themselves out of Russia on two Red Navy cruisers, about a thousand of them; then they systematically triggered off every ballistic missile they could find . . . and they could find all of them, sooner or later, it was just a matter of looking. As soon as it was safe they moved in here. Best place in the world for them.

"There are only a thousand or so of them here on the Islands, and nobody outside the Islands even knows where they are. If they did, what good would it do them? They can kill anyone, anywhere. They kill for fun, but sometimes they kill for a reason too. When one of them goes wandering for kicks he makes it a point to mess up all the transport and communications facilities he comes across — especially now, since they've stockpiled everything they're likely to need for the next twenty years. We don't know what they're planning to do when the twenty years are up. Maybe they don't care. Would you?"

Chandler drained his drink and shook his head. "One question," he said. "Who's 'we'?"

Hsi carefully unwrapped a package of cigarettes, took one out and lit it. He looked at it as though he were not enjoying it; cigarettes had a way of tasting stale these days. As they were. "Just a minute," he said.

Tardily Chandler remembered the quick grasp of the waiter's fingers on Hsi's wrist, and that the waiter had been hovering, inconspicuously close, all through their meal. Hsi was waiting for the man to return.

In a moment the waiter was back, looking directly at Chandler. He looped his own wrist with his fingers and nodded. Hsi said softly, "'We'" is the Society of Slaves. That's all of us — slaves — but only a few of us belong to the Society. We—"

There was a crash of glass. The waiter had dropped their tray.

Across the table from Chandler, Hsi looked suddenly changed. His left hand lay on the table before him, his right hand poised over it. Apparently he had been about to show Chandler again the sign he had made.

But he could not do it. His hand paused and fluttered, like a captured bird. Captured it was.

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Hsi was captured. Out of Hsi's mouth, with Hsi's voice, came the light, tonal rhythms of Rosalie Pan. "*This* is an unexpected pleasure, love! I never expected to see you here. Enjoying your meal?"

IX

CHANDLER had his empty glass halfway to his lips, automatically, before he realized there was nothing in it to brace him. He said hoarsely, "Yes, thanks. Do you come here often?" It was like the banal talk of a language guide, wildly inappropriate to what had been going on a moment before. He was shaken.

"Oh, I love it," cooed Hsi, investigating the dishes before him. "All finished, I see. Too bad. Your friend doesn't feel like he ate much, either."

"I guess he wasn't hungry," Chandler managed.

"Well, I am." Hsi cocked his head and smiled like a female impersonator. "I know! Are you doing anything special right now, love? I know you've eaten, but—well, I've been a good girl and I guess I can eat a real meal, I mean not with somebody else's teeth, and still keep the calories in line. Suppose I meet you down at the Beach? There's a place there where the luau is divine. I can be there in half an hour."

Chandler's breathing was back to normal. Why not? "I'll be delighted."

"Luigi the Wharf Rat, that's the name of it. They won't let you in, though, unless you tell them you're with me. It's special." Hsi's eye closed in Rosalie Pan's wink. "Half an hour," Hsi said, and was again himself. He began to shake.

The waiter brought him straight whiskey and, pretense abandoned, stood by while Hsi drank it. After a moment he said, "Scares you. But — I guess we're all right. She couldn't have heard much. You'd better go, Chandler. I'll talk to you again some other time."

Chandler stood up. But he couldn't leave Hsi like that. "Are you all right?"

Hsi almost managed control. "Oh — I think so. Not the first time it's come close, you know. Sooner or later it'll come closer still and that will be the end, but — yes, I'm all right for now."

Chandler tarried. "You were saying something about the Society of Slaves."

"Damn it, go!" Hsi barked. "She'll be waiting for you . . . Sorry, I didn't mean to shout. But go." As Chandler turned, he said more quietly, "Come around to the store tomorrow. Maybe we can finish our talk then."

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LUIGI the Wharf Rat's was not actually on the beach but on the bank of a body of water called the Ala Wai Canal. Across the water were the snowtopped hills. A maitre-de escorted Chandler personally to a table on a balcony, and there he waited. Rosalie "half-hour" was nearly two; but then he heard her calling him from across the room, in the voice which had reached a thousand second balconies, and he rose as she came near.

She said lightly, "Sorry. You ought to be flattered, though. It's a twenty-minute drive — and an hour and a half to put on my face, so you won't be ashamed to be seen with me. Well, it's good to be out in my own skin for a change. Let's eat!"

The talk with Hsi had left a mark on Chandler that not even this girl's pretty face could obscure. It was a pretty face, though, and she was obviously exerting herself to make him enjoy himself. He could not help responding to her mood.

She talked of her life on the stage, the excitement of a performance, the entertainers she had known. Her conversation was one long name-drop, but it was not pretense: the world of the famous was the world she had lived in. It was not a world that Chandler had ever visited, but he recognized the names. Rosie had been married once to an English actor whose movies Chandler had made a point of watching on television. It was interesting, in a way, to know that the man snored and lived principally on vitamin pills. But it was a view of the man that Chandler had not sought.

The restaurant drew its clientele mostly from the execs, young ones or young-acting ones, like the girl. The coronets were all over. There had been a sign on the door:

KAPU, WALIHINI!

to mark it off limits to anyone not an exec or a collaborator. Still, Chandler thought, who on the island was not a collaborator? The only effective resistance a man could make would be to kill everyone within reach and then himself, thus depriving them of slaves — and that was, after all, only what the execs themselves had done in other places often enough. It would inconvenience them only slightly. The next few planeloads or shiploads of possessed warm bodies from the mainland would be permitted to live, instead of being required to dash themselves to destruction, like the crew of the airplane that had carried Chandler. Thus the domestic stocks would be replenished.

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An annoying feature of dining with Rosalie in the flesh, Chandler found, was that half a dozen times while they were talking he found himself taken, speaking words to Rosie that were not his own, usually in a language he did not understand. She took it as a matter of course. It was merely a friend, across the room or across the island, using Chandler as the casual convenience of a telephone. "Sorry," she apologized blithely after it happened for the third time, and then stopped. "You don't like that, love, do you?"

"Can you blame me?" He stopped himself from saying more; he was astonished even so at his tone.

She said it for him. "I know. It takes away your manhood, I suppose. Please don't let it do that to you, love. We're not so bad. Even—" She hesitated, and did not go on. "You know," she said, "I came here the same way you did. Kidnaped off the stage of the Winter Garden. Of course, the difference was the one who kidnaped me was an old friend. Though I didn't know it at the time and it scared me half to death."

Chandler must have looked startled. She nodded. "You've been thinking of us as another race, haven't you? Like the Neanderthals or — well, worse than that, maybe." She smiled. "We're not. About half of us came from Russia in the first place, but the others are from all over. You'd be astonished, really." She mentioned several names, world-famous scientists, musicians, writers. "Of course, not everybody can qualify for the club, love. Wouldn't be exclusive otherwise. The chief rule is loyalty. I'm loyal," she added gently after a moment, "and don't you forget it. Have to be. Whoever becomes an exec has to be with us, all the way. There are tests. It has to be that way — not only for our protection. For the world's."

Chandler was genuinely startled at that. Rosie nodded seriously. "If one exec should give away something he's not supposed to it would upset the whole applecart. There are only a thousand of us, and I guess probably two billion of you, or nearly. The result would be complete destruction."

Of the Executive Committee, Chandler thought she meant at first, but then he thought again. No. Of the world. For the thousand execs, outnumbered though they were two million to one, could not fail to triumph. The contest would not be in doubt. If the whole thousand execs at once began systematically to kill and destroy, instead of merely playing at it as the spirit moved

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them, they could all but end the human race overnight. A man could be made to slash his throat in a quarter of a minute. An exec, killing, killing, killing without pause, could destroy his own two million enemies in an eight-hour day.

And there were surer, faster ways. Chandler did not have to imagine them, he had seen them. The massacre of the Orphalese, the victims at the Monument — they were only crumbs of destruction. What had happened to New York City showed what mass-production methods could do. No doubt there were bombs left, even if only chemical ones. Shoot, stab, crash, blow up; swallow poison, leap from window, slit throat. Every man a murderer, at the touch of a mind from Hawaii; and if no one else was near to murder, surely each man could find a victim in himself. In one ravaging day mankind would cease to exist as a major force. In a week the only survivors would be those in such faroff and hopelessly impotent places that they were not worth the trouble of tracking down.

"YOU hate us, don't you?" Chandler paused and tried to find an answer. Rosie was not either belligerent or mocking. She was only sympathetically trying to reach his point of view. He shook his head silently.

"Not meaning 'no' — meaning 'no comment'? Well, I don't blame you, love. But do you see that we're not altogether a bad thing? It's bad that there should be so much violence. In a way. Hasn't there always been violence? And what were the alternatives? Until we came along the world was getting ready to kill itself anyway."

"There's a difference," Chandler mumbled. He was thinking of his wife. He and Margot had loved each other as married couples do — without any very great, searing compulsion; but with affection, with habit and with sporadic passion. Chandler had not given much thought to the whole, though he was aware of the parts, during the last years of his marriage. It was only after Margot's murder that he had come to know that the sum of those parts was a quite irreplaceable love.

But Rosie was shaking her head. "The difference is all on our side. Suppose Koitska's boss had never discovered the coronets. At any moment one country might have got nervous and touched off the whole thing — not carefully, the way we did it, with most of the really dirty missiles fused safe and others landing where they were supposed to go. I mean, touched off a *war*.

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The end, love. The bloody *finis*. The ones that were killed at once would have been the lucky ones. No, love," she said, in dead earnest, "we aren't the worst things that ever happened to the world. Once the — well, the *bad* part — is over, people will understand what we really are."

"And what's that, exactly?"

She hesitated, smiled and said modestly, "We're gods."

It took Chandler's breath away — not because it was untrue, but because it had never occurred to him that gods were aware of their deity.

"We're gods, love, with the privilege of electing mortals to the club. Don't judge us by anything that has gone before. Don't judge us by anything. We are a New Thing. We don't have to conform to precedent because we upset all precedents. From now on, to the end of time, the rules will grow from us."

She patted her lips briskly with a napkin and said, "Would you like to see something? Let's take a little walk."

She took him by the hand and led him across the room, out to a sundeck on the other side of the restaurant. They were looking down on what had once been a garden. There were people in it; Chandler was conscious of sounds coming from them, and he was able to see that there were dozens of them, perhaps a hundred, and that they all seemed to be wearing suntans like his own.

"From Tripler?" he guessed.

"No, love. They pick out those clothes themselves. Stand there a minute."

The girl in the coronet walked out to the rail of the sundeck, where pink and amber spotlights were playing on nothing. As she came into the colored lights there was a sigh from the people in the garden. A man walked forward with an armload of leis and deposited them on the ground below the rail.

They were *adoring* her.

Rosalie stood gravely for a moment, then nodded and returned to Chandler.

"They began doing that about a year ago," she whispered to him, as a murmur of disappointment came up from the crowd. "Their own idea. We didn't know what they wanted at first, but they weren't doing any harm. You see, love," she said softly, "we can make them do anything we like. But we don't make them do that."

HOURS later, Chandler was not sure just how, they were in a light plane flying high over the Pacific, clear out of sight of land. The moon was gold above them, the ocean black beneath.

Chandler stared down as the

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girl circled the plane, slipping lower toward the water, silent and perplexed. But he was not afraid. He was almost content. Rosie was good company — gay, cheerful—and she had treasures to share. It had been an impulse of hers, a long drive in her sports car and a quick, comfortable flight over the ocean to cap the evening. It had been a pleasant impulse. He reflected gravely that he could understand now how generations of country maidens had been dazzled and despoiled. A touch of luxury was a great seducer.

The coronet on the girl's body could catch his body at any moment. She had only to think herself into his mind, and her will, flashed to a relay station like the one he was building for Koitska, at loose in infinity, could sweep into him and make him a puppet. If she chose, he would open that door beside him and step out into a thousand feet of air and a meal for the sharks.

But he did not think she would do it. He did not think anyone would, really, though with his own eyes he had seen some anyones do things as bad as that and sickeningly worse. There was no corrupt whim of the most diseased mind in history that some torpid exec had not visited on a helpless man, woman or child in the past years. Even as they flew here, Chandler knew, the gross bodies that lay in luxury in the island's villas were surging restlessly around the world; and death and horror remained where they had passed. It was a paradox too great to be reconciled, this girl and this vileness. He could not forget it, but he could not feel it in his glands. She was pretty. She was gay. He began to think thoughts that had left him alone for a long time.

The dark bulk of the island showed ahead and they were sinking toward a landing.

The girl landed skillfully on a runway that sprang into light as she approached — electronic wizardry, or the coronet and some tethered serf at a switch? It didn't matter. Nothing mattered very greatly at that moment to Chandler.

"Thank you, love," she said, laughing. "I liked that. It's all very well to use someone else's body for this sort of thing, but every now and then I want to keep my own in practice."

She linked arms with him as they left the plane. "When I was first given the coronet here," she reminisced, amusement in her voice, "I got the habit real bad. I spent six awful months — really, six months in bed! And by myself at that. Oh, I was all over the world, and skin-diving on the Barrier Reef and skiing in

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Norway and — well," she said, squeezing his arm, "never *mind* what all. And then one day I got on the scales, just out of habit. Do you know what I *weighed?*" She closed her eyes in mock horror, but they were smiling when she opened them again. "I won't do that again, love. Of course, a lot of us do let ourselves go. Even Koitska. Especially Koitska. And some of the women — But just between us, the ones who do really didn't have much to keep in shape in the first place."

She led the way into a villa that smelled of jasmine and gardenias, snapped her fingers and subdued lights came on. "Like it? Oh, we've nothing but the best. What would you like to drink?"

She fixed them both tall, cold glasses and vetoed Chandler's choice of a sprawling wicker chair to sit on. "Over here, love." She patted the couch beside her. She drew up her legs, leaning against him, very soft, warm and fragrant, and said dreamily, "Let me see. What's nice? What do you like in music, love?"

"Oh . . . anything."

"No, no! You're supposed to say, 'Why, the original-cast album from *Hi There.*' Or anything else I starred in." She shook her head reprovingly, and the points of her coronet caught golden reflections from the lights. "But since you're obviously a man of low taste I'll have to do the whole bit myself." She touched switches at a remote-control set by her end of the couch, and in a moment dreamy strings began to come from triaural speakers hidden around the room. It was not *Hi There.* "That's better," she said drowsily, and in a moment, "Wasn't it nice in the plane?"

"It was fine," Chandler said. Gently — but firmly — he sat up and reached automatically into his pocket.

The girl sighed and straightened. "Cigarette? They're on the table beside you. Hope you like the brand. They only keep one big factory going, not to count those terrible Russian things that're all air and no smoke." She touched his forehead with cool fingers. "You never told me about that, love."

It was like an electric shock — the touch of her fingers and the touch of reality at once. Chandler said stiffly, "My brand. But I thought you were there at the trial."

"Oh, only now and then. I missed all the naughty parts — though, to tell the truth, that's why I was hanging around. I do like to hear a little naughtiness now and then . . . but all I heard was that stupid lawyer and that stupid judge. Made me mad." She giggled. "Lucky for you. I

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was so irritated I decided to spoil their fun too."

CHANDLER sat up and took a long pull at his drink. Curiously, it seemed to sober him. He said: "It's nothing. I happened to rape and kill a young girl. Happens every day. Of course, it was one of your friends that was doing it for me, but I didn't miss any of what was going on, I can give you a blow-by-blow description if you like. The people in the town where I lived, at that time, thought I was doing it on my own, though, and they didn't approve. Hoaxing — you know? They thought I was so perverse and cruel that I would do that sort of thing under my own power, instead of with some exec — or, as they would have put it, being ignorant, some imp, or devil, or demon — pulling the strings."

He was shaking. He waited for what she had to say; but she only whispered, "I'm sorry, love," and looked so contrite and honest that, as rapidly as it had come upon him, his anger passed.

He opened his mouth to say something to her. He didn't get it said. She was sitting there, looking at him, alone and soft and inviting. He kissed her; and as she returned the kiss, he kissed her again, and again.

But less than an hour later he was in her Porsche, cold sober, raging, frustrated, miserable. He slammed it through the unfamiliar gears as he sped back to the city.

She had left him. They had kissed with increasing passion, his hands playing about her, her body surging toward him, and then, just then, she whispered, "No, love." He held her tighter and without another word she opened her eyes and looked at him.

He knew what mind it was that caught him then. It was her mind. Stiffly, like wood, he released her, stood up, walked to the door and locked it behind him.

The lights in the villa went out. He stood there, boiling, looking into the shadows through the great, wide, empty window. He could see her lying there on the couch, and as he watched he saw her body toss and stir; and as surely as he had ever known anything before he knew that somewhere in the world some woman — or some man! — lay locked with a lover, violent in love, and was unable to tell the other that a third party had invaded their bed.

Chandler did not know it until he saw something glistening on his wrist, but he was weeping on the wild ride back to Honolulu in the car. Her car. Would there

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be trouble for his taking it? God, let there be trouble! He was in a mood for trouble. He was sick and wild with revulsion.

Worse than her use of him, a casual stimulant, an aphrodisiac touch, was that she thought what she did was right. Chandler thought of the worshipping dozens under the sundeck of the exec restaurant, and Rosalie's gracious benediction as they made her their floral offerings. Blind, pathetic fools!

Not only the deluded men and women in the garden were worshippers trapped in a vile religion, he thought. It was worse. The gods and goddesses worshipped at their own divinity as well!

X

THREE days later Koitska's voice, coming from Chandler's lips, summoned him out to the TWA shack again.

Wise now in the ways of this world, Chandler commandeered a police car and was hurried out to the South Gate, where the guards allowed him a car of his own. The door of the building was unlocked and Chandler went right up.

He was astonished. The fat man was actually sitting up. He was fully dressed — more or less; incongruously he wore flowered shorts and a bright red, short-sleeve shirt, with rope sandals. He said, "You fly a *gili-kopter?* No? No difference. Help me." An arm like a mountain went over Chandler's shoulders. The man must have weighed three hundred pounds. Slowly, wheezing, he limped toward the back of the room and touched a button.

A door opened.

Chandler had not known before that there was an elevator in the building. That was one of the things the exec did not consider important for his slaves to know. It lowered them with great grace and delicacy to the first floor, where a large old Cadillac, ancient but immaculately kept, the kind that used to be called a "gangster's car," waited in a private parking bay.

Chandler followed Koitska's directions and drove to an airfield where a small, Plexiglas-nosed helicopter waited. More by the force of Chandler pushing him from behind than through his own fat thighs, Koitska puffed up the little staircase into the cabin. Originally the copter had been fitted for four passengers. Now there was the pilot's seat and a seat beside it, and in the back a wide, soft couch. Koitska collapsed onto it. His face blanked out — he was, Chandler knew, somewhere else, just then.

In a moment his eyes opened

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again. He looked at Chandler with no interest at all, and turned his face to the wall.

After a moment he wheezed. "Sit down. At de controls." He breathed noisily for a while. Then, "It von't pay you to be interested in Rosalie," he said.

Chandler was startled. He craned around in the seat but saw only Koitska's back. "I'm not! Or anyway —" But he had no place to go in that sentence, and in any case Koitska no longer seemed interested.

After a moment Koitska stirred, settled himself more comfortably, and Chandler felt himself taken. He turned to face the split wheel and the unfamiliar pedals and watched himself work the controls. It was an admirable performance. Whoever Chandler was just then — he could not guess — he was a first-class helicopter pilot.

THEY crossed a wide body of ocean and approached another island; from one quick glance at a navigation map that his eyes had taken, Chandler guessed it to be Hilo. He landed the craft expertly on the margin of a small airstrip, where two DC-3s were already parked and being unloaded, and felt himself free again.

Two husky young men, apparently native Hawaiians by their size, rolled up a ramp and assisted Koitska down it and into a building. Chandler was left to his own devices. The building was rundown but sound. Around it stalky grass clumped, long uncut, and a few mauve and scarlet blossoms, almost hidden, showed where someone had once tended beds of bougainvillea and poinsettias. He could not guess what the building had been doing there, looking like a small office-factory combination out in the remote wilds, until he caught sight of a sign the winds had blown against a wall: *Dole*. Apparently this had been headquarters for one of the plantations. Now it was stripped almost clean inside, a welter of desks and rusted machines piled heedlessly where there once had been a parking lot. New equipment was being loaded into it from the cargo planes. Chandler recognized some of it as from the list he had given the parts man, Hsi. There also seemed to be a gasoline-driven generator — a large one — but what the other things were he could not guess.

Besides Koitska, there were at least five coronet-wearing execs visible around the place. Chandler was not surprised. It would have to be something big to winkle these torpid slugs out of their shells, but he knew what it was, and that it was big enough

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to them indeed; in fact, it was their lives. He deduced that Koitska's plans for his future comfort required a standby transmitter to service the coronets, in case something went wrong. And clearly it was this that they were to put together here.

For ten hours, while the afternoon became dark night, they worked at a furious pace. When the sun set one of the execs gestured and the generator was started, rocking on its rubber-tired wheels as its rotors spun and fumes chugged out, and they worked on by strings of incandescent lights. It was pick-and-shovel work for Chandler, no engineering, just unloading and roughly grouping the equipment where it was ready to be assembled. The execs did not take part in the work. Nor were they idle. They busied themselves in one room of the building with some small device — Chandler could not see what — and when he looked again it was gone. He did not see them take it away and did not know where it was taken. Toward midnight he suddenly realized that it was likely some essential part which they would not permit anyone but themselves to handle, and that, no doubt, was why they had come in person, instead of working through proxies.

Just before they left Koitska and two or three of the other execs quizzed him briefly. He was too tired to think beyond the questions, but they seemed to be trying to find out if he was able to do the simpler parts of the construction without superfision, and they seemed satisfied with the answers. He flew the helicopter home, with someone else guilding his arms and legs, but he was half asleep as he did it, and he never quite remembered how he managed to get back to his room at Tripler.

THE next morning he went back to Parts 'n Plenty with an additional list, covering replacement of some parts that had been damaged. Hsi glanced at it quickly and nodded. "All this stuff I have. You can pick it up this afternoon if you like."

Chandler offered him a cigarette out of a stale pack. "About the other night —"

Hsi began to perspire, but he said, casually enough, "Interested in baseball?"

"Baseball?"

Hsi said, as though there had been nothing incongruous about the question, "There'll be a Little League game this afternoon. Back of the school on Punahou and Wilder. I thought I might stop by, then we can come back and pick up the rest of your gear. Two o'clock. Hope I'll see you."

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Chandler walked away thoughtfully. He had no real intention of going there, but something in Hsi's attitude suggested more than a ball game; after a quick and poor lunch he decided to go.

The field was a dirty playground, scuffed out of what had probably once been an attractive campus. The players were ten-year-olds, of the mixture of hair colors and complexions typical of the islands. Chandler was puzzled. Surely even the wildest baseball rooter wouldn't go far out of his way for this, and yet there was an audience of at least fifty adults watching the game. And none seemed to be related to the ballplayers. The Little Leaguers played grave, careful ball, and the audience watched them without a word of parental encouragement or joy.

Hsi approached him from the shadow of the school building. "Glad you could make it, Chandler. No, no questions. Just watch."

In the fifth inning, with the score aggregating around thirty, there was an interruption. A tall, red-headed man glanced at his watch, licked his lips, took a deep breath and walked out onto the diamond. He glanced at the crowd, while the kids suspended play without surprise. Then the red-headed man nodded to the umpire and stepped off the field. The ballplayers resumed their game, but now the whole attention of the audience was on the red-headed man.

Suspicion crossed Chandler's mind. In a moment it was confirmed, as the red-headed man raised his hands waist high and clasped his right hand around his left wrist — only for a moment, but that was enough.

The ball game was a cover. Chandler was present at a meeting of what Hsi had called The Society of Slaves, the underground that dared to pit itself against the execs.

Hsi cleared his throat and said, "This is the one. I vouch for him." And that was startling too, Chandler thought, because all these wrist-circled men and women were looking at *him.*

"ALL right," said the red-headed man nervously, "let's get started then. First thing, anybody got any weapons? Sure? Take a look — we don't want any slipups. Turn out your pockets."

There was a flurry and a woman near Chandler held up a key ring with a tiny knife on it. "Penknife? Hell, yes; get rid of it. Throw it in the outfield. You can pick it up after the meeting." A hundred eyes watched the pearly object fly. "We ought to be all right here," said the red-headed man. "The kids have been play-

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ing every day this week and nobody looked in. But *watch your neighbor.* See anything suspicious, don't wait. Don't take a chance. Holler 'Kill the umpire!' or anything you like, but holler. Good and loud." He paused, breathing hard. "All right, Hsi. Introduce him."

The parts man took Chandler firmly by the shoulder. "This fellow has something for us," he said. "He's working for the exec Koitska, building what can't be anything else but a duplicate of the machine that they use to control us. He—"

"Wait a minute!" A bearded man came forward and peered furiously into Chandler's face. "Look at his head! Don't you see he's branded?"

Chandler touched his scar as the man with the beard hissed, "Damned hoaxer! This is the lowest species of life on the face of the earth — someone who pretended to be possessed in order to do some damned dirty act. What was it, hoaxer? Murder? Burning babies alive?"

Hsi economically let go of Chandler's shoulder, half turned the bearded man with one hand and swung with the other. "Shut up, Linton. Wait till you hear what he's got for us."

The bearded man, sprawling and groggy, slowly rose as Hsi explained tersely what he had guessed of Chandler's work — as much as Chandler himself knew, it seemed. "Maybe this is only a duplicate. Maybe it won't be used. But maybe it will — and Chandler's the man who can sabotage it! How would you like that? The execs switching over to this equipment while the other one is down for maintenance — and their headsets don't work!"

There was a terrible silence, except for the sounds of the children playing ball. Two runs had just scored. Chandler recognized the silence. It was hope.

Linton broke it, his blue eyes gleaming above the beard. "No! Better than that. Why wait? We can *use* this fellow's machine. Set it up, get us some headsets — and we can control the execs themselves!"

THE silence was even longer; then there was a babble of discussion, but Chandler did not take part in it. He was thinking. It was a tremendous thought.

Suppose a man like himself were actually able to do what they wanted of him. Never mind the practical difficulties — learning how it worked, getting a headset, bypassing the traps Koitska would surely have set to prevent just that. Never mind the penalties for failure. Suppose he could make it work, and find fifty headsets, and fit them to the fifty men

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and women here in this clandestine meeting of the Society of Slaves . . .

Would there, after all, be any change worth mentioning in the state of the world?

Or was Lord Acton, always and everywhere, right? Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. The power locked in the coronets of the exec was more than flesh and blood could stand; he could almost sense the rot in those near him at the mere thought.

But Hsi was throwing cold water on the idea. "Sorry, but I know that much: One exec can't control another. The headpieces insulate against control. Well." He glanced at his watch. "We agreed on twenty minutes maximum for this meeting," he reminded the red-headed man, who nodded.

"You're right." He glanced around the group. "I'll make the rest of it fast. News: You all know they got some more of us last week. Have you all been by the Monument? Three of our comrades were still there this morning. But I don't think they know we're organized, they think it's only individual acts of sabotage. In case any of you don't know, the execs can't read our minds. Not even when they're controlling us. Proof is we're all still alive. Hanrahan knew practically every one of us, and he's been lying out there for a week with a broken back, ever since they caught him trying to blow up the guard pits at East Gate. They had plenty of chance to pump him if they could. *They can't.* Next thing. No more individual attacks on one exec. Not unless it's a matter of life and death, and even then you're wasting your time unless you've got a gun. They can grab your mind faster than you can cut a throat. Third thing: Don't get the idea there are good execs and bad execs. Once they put that thing on their heads they're all the same. Fourth thing. You can't make deals. They aren't that worried. So if anybody's thinking of selling out — I'm not saying anyone is — forget it." He looked around. "Anything else?"

"What about germ warfare in the water supply?" somebody ventured.

"Still looking into it. No report yet. All right, that's enough for now. Meeting's adjourned. Watch the ball game for a while, then drift away. *One at a time.*"

Hsi was the first to go, then a couple of women together, then a sprinkling of other men. Chandler was in no particular hurry, although it seemed time to leave anyway, because the ball game appeared to be over. A ten-year-old with freckles on his face was

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at the plate, but he was leaning on his bat, staring at Chandler with wide, serious eyes.

Chandler felt a sudden chill.

He turned, began to walk away — and felt himself seized.

HE WALKED slowly into the schoolhouse, unable to look around. Behind him he heard a confused sob, tears and a child's voice trying to blubber through: "Something *funny* happened."

If the child had been an adult it might have been warning enough. But the child had never experienced possession before, was not sure enough, was clear into the schoolhouse before the remaining members of the Society of Slaves awoke to their danger. He heard a quick cry of *They got him!* Then Chandler's legs stopped walking and he addressed himself savagely. A few yards away a stout Chinese lady was mopping the tiles; she looked up at him, startled, but no more startled than Chandler was himself. "You idiot!" Chandler blazed. "Why do you have to get mixed up in this? Don't you know it's wrong, love? Stay here!" Chandler commanded himself. "Don't you *dare* leave this building!"

And he was free again, but there was a sudden burst of screams from outside.

Bewildered, Chandler stood for a moment, as little able to move as though the girl still had him under control. Then he leaped through a classroom to a window, staring. Outside in the playground there was wild confusion. Half the spectators were on the ground, trying to rise. As he watched, a teen-age boy hurled himself at an elderly lady, the two of them falling. Another man flung himself to the ground. A woman swung her pocketbook into the face of the man next to her. One of the fallen ones rose, only to trip himself again. It was a mad spectacle, but Chandler understood it: What he was watching was a single member of the exec trying to keep a group of twenty ordinary, unarmed human beings in line. The exec was leaping from mind to mind; even so, the crowd was beginning to scatter.

Without thought Chandler started to leap out to help them; but the possessor had anticipated that. He was caught at the door. He whirled and ran toward the woman with the mop; as he was released, the woman flung herself upon him, knocking him down.

By the time he was able to get up again it was far too late to help . . . if there ever had been a time when he could have been of any real help.

He heard shots. Two policeman had come running into the

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playground, with guns drawn.

The exec who had looked at him out of the boy's eyes, who had penetrated this nest of enemies and extricated Chandler from it, had taken first things first. Help had been summoned. Quick as the coronets worked, it was no time at all until the nearest persons with weapons were located, commandeered and in action.

Two minutes later there no longer was resistance.

Obviously more execs had come to help, attracted by the commotion perhaps, or summoned at some stolen moment after the meeting had first been invaded. There were only five survivors on the field. Each was clearly controlled. They rose and stood patiently while the two police shot them, shot them, paused to reload and shot again. The last to die was the bearded man, Linton, and as he fell his eyes brushed Chandler's.

Chandler leaned against a wall.

It had been a terrible sight. The nearness of his own death had been almost the least of it.

He had no doubt of the identity of the exec who had saved him and destroyed the others. Though he had heard the voice only as it came from his own mouth, he could not miss it. It was Rosalie Pan.

He looked out at the red-headed man, sprawled across the foul line behind third base, and remembered what he had said. There weren't any good execs or bad execs. There were only execs.

XI

WHATEVER Chandler's life might be worth, he knew he had given it away and the girl had given it back to him.

He did not see her for several days, but the morning after the massacre he woke to find a note beside his bed table. No one had been in the room. It was his own sleeping hand that had written it, though the girl's mind had moved his fingers:

> If you get mixed up in anything like that again I won't be able to help you. So don't! Those people are just using you, you know. Don't throw away your chances. Do you like surfboarding?
>
> Rosie

But by then there was no time for surfboarding, or for anything else but work. The construction job on Hilo had begun, and it was a nightmare. He was flown to the island with the last load of parts. No execs were present in the flesh, but in the first day Chandler lost count of how many different minds possessed his own. He began to be able to rec-

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ognize them by a limp as he walked, by tags of German as he spoke, by a stutter, a distinctive gesture of annoyance, an expletive. As he was a trained engineer he was left to labor by himself for hours on end. It was worse for the others. There seemed to be a dozen execs hovering invisible around all the time; no sooner was a worker released by one than he was seized by another. The work progressed rapidly, but at the cost of utter exhaution. By the end of the fourth day Chandler had eaten only two meals and could not remember when he had slept last. He found himself staggering when free, and furious with the fatigue-clumsiness of his own body when possessed. At sundown on the fourth day he found himself free for a moment and, incredibly, without work of his own to do just then, until someone else completed a job of patchwiring. He stumbled out into the open air and had time only to gaze around for a moment before his eyes began to close. This must once have been a lovely island. Even unkempt as it was, the trees were tall and beautiful. Beyond them a wisp of smoke was pale against the dark-blue evening sky; the breeze was scented . . . He woke and found he was already back in the building, reaching for his soldering gun.

There came a point at which even the will of the execs was unable to drive the flogged bodies farther, and then they were permitted to sleep for a few hours. At daybreak they were awake again. The sleep was not enough. The bodies were slow and inaccurate. Two of the Hawaiians, straining a hundred-pound component into place, staggered, slipped — and dropped it.

Appalled, Chandler waited for them to kill themselves.

But it seemed that the execs were tiring too. One of the Hawaiians said irritably, with an accent Chandler did not recognize: "That's pau. All right, you morons, you've won yourselves a vacation; we'll have to fly you in replacements. Take the day off." And incredibly all eleven of the haggard wrecks stumbling around the building were free at once.

The first thought of every man was to eat, to relieve himself, to remove a shoe and ease a blistered foot — to do any of the things they had not been permitted to do. The second thought was sleep.

Chandler dropped off at once, but he was overtired; he slept fitfully, and after an hour or two of turning on the hard ground sat up, blinking red-eyed around. He had been slow. The cushioned seats in the aircraft and cars

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were already taken. He stood up, stretched, scratched himself and wondered what to do next, and he remembered the thread of smoke he had seen — when? three nights ago? — against the evening sky.

In all those hours he had not had time to think one obvious thought: There should have been no smoke there! The island was supposed to be deserted.

He stood up, looked around to get his bearings, and started off in the direction he remembered.

IT WAS good to own his body again, in poor condition as it was. It was delicious to be allowed to think consecutive thoughts.

The chemistry of the human animal is such that it heals whatever thrusts it may receive from the outside world. Short of death, its only incapacitating wound comes from itself; from the outside it can survive astonishing blows, rise again and flourish. Chandler was not flourishing, but he had begun to rise.

Time had been so compressed and blurred in the days since the slaughter at the Punahou School that he had not had time to grieve over the deaths of his briefly-met friends, or even to think of their quixotic plans against the execs. Now he began to wonder.

He understood with what thrill of hope he had been received — a man like themselves, not an exec, whose touch was at the very center of the exec power. But how firm was that touch? Was there really anything he could do?

It seemed not. He barely understood the mechanics of what he was doing, far less the theory behind it. Conceivably knowing where this installation was he could somehow get back to it when it was completed. In theory it might be that there was a way to dispense with the headsets and exert power from the big board itself.

A Cro-Magnard at the controls of a nuclear-laden jet bomber could destroy a city. Nothing stopped him. Nothing but his own invincible ignorance. Chandler was that Cro-Magnard; certainly power was here to grasp, but he had no way of knowing how to pick it up.

Still — where there was life there was hope. He decided he was wasting time that would not come again. He had been wandering along a road that led into a small town, quite deserted, but this was no time for wandering. His place was back at the installation, studying, scheming, trying to understand all he could. He began to turn, and stopped.

"Great God," he said softly,

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looking at what he had just seen. The town was deserted of life, but not of death.

THERE were bodies everywhere.

They were long dead, perhaps years. They seemed natural and right as they lay there. It was not surprising they had escaped his notice at first. Little was left but bones and an occasional desiccated leathery rag that might have been a face. The clothing was faded and rotted away; but enough was left of the bodies and the clothes to make it clear that none of these people had died natural deaths. A rusted blade in a chest cage showed where a knife had pierced a heart; a small skull near his feet (with a scrap of faded blue rompers near it) was shattered. On a flagstone terrace a family group of bones lay radiating outward, like a rosette. Something had exploded there and caught them all as they turned to flee. There was a woman's face, grained like oak and eyeless, visible between the fender of a truck and a crushed-in wall.

Like exhumed Pompeii, the tragedy was so ancient that it aroused only wonder. The whole town had been blotted out.

The execs did not take chances; apparently they had sterilized the whole island — probably had sterilized all of them except Oahu itself, to make certain that their isolation was complete, except for the captive stock allowed to breed and serve them in and around Honolulu.

Chandler prowled the town for a quarter of an hour, but one street was like another. The bodies did not seem to have been disturbed even by animals, but perhaps there were none big enough to show traces of such work.

Something moved in a doorway.

Chandler thought at once of the smoke he had seen, but no one answered his call and, though he searched, he could neither see nor hear anything alive.

The search was a waste of time. It also wasted his best chance to study the thing he was building. As he returned to the cinder-block structure at the end of the airstrip he heard motors and looked up to see a plane circling in for a landing.

He knew that he had only a few minutes. He spent those minutes as thriftily as he could, but long before he could even grasp the circuitry of the parts he had not himself worked on he felt a touch at his mind. The plane was rolling to a stop. He and all of them hurried over to begin unloading it.

The plane was stopped with

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one wingtip almost touching the building, heading directly into it — convenient for unloading, but a foolish nuisance when it came time to turn it and take off again, Chandler's mind thought while his body lugged cartons out of the plane.

But he knew the answer to that. Takeoff would be no problem, any more than it would for the other small transports at the far end of the strip.

These planes were not going to return, ever.

THE work went on, and then it was done, or all but, and Chandler knew no more about it than when it was begun. The last little bit was a careful check of line voltages and a balancing of biases. Chandler could help only up to a point, and then two execs, working through the bodies of one of the Hawaiians and the pilot of a Piper Tri-Pacer who had flown in some last-minute test equipment — and remained as part of the labor pool — laboriously worked on the final tests.

Spent, the other men flopped to the ground, waiting.

They were far gone. All of them, Chandler as much as the others. But one of them rolled over, grinned tightly at Chandler and said, "It's been fun. My name's Bradley. I always think people ought to know each other's names in cases like this. Imagine sharing a grave with some utter stranger!"

"Grave?"

Bradley nodded. "Like Pharaoh's slaves. The pyramid is just about finished, friend. You don't know what I'm talking about?" He sat up, plucked a blade of stemmy grass and put it between his teeth. "I guess you haven't seen the corpses in the woods."

Chandler said, "I found a town half a mile or so over there, nothing in it but skeletons."

"No, heavens, nothing that ancient. These are nice fresh corpses, out behind the junkheap there. Well, not *fresh*. They're a couple of weeks old. I thought it was neat of the execs to dispose of the used-up labor out of sight of the rest of us. So much better for morale . . . until Juan Simoa and I went back looking for a plain, simple electrical extension cord and found them."

With icy calm Chandler realized that the man was talking sense. Used-up labor: the men who had unloaded the first planes, no doubt — worked until they dropped, then efficiently disposed of, as they were so cheap a commodity that they were not worth the trouble of hauling back to Honolulu for salvage. "I see," he said. "Besides, dead men tell no tales."

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"*And* spread no disease. Probably that's why they did their killing back in the tall trees. Always the chance some exec might have to come down here to inspect in person. Rotting corpses just aren't sanitary." Bradley grinned again. "I used to be a doctor at Molokai."

"Lep —" began Chandler, but the doctor shook his head.

"No, no, never say 'leprosy.' It's 'Hansen's disease.' Whatever it is, the execs were sure scared of it. They wiped out every patient we had, except a couple who got away by swimming; then for good measure they wiped out most of the medical staff too, except for a couple like me who were off-island and had the sense to keep quiet about where they'd worked. I used," he said, rolling over his back and putting his hands behind his head, "in the old days to work on pest-control for the Public Health Service. We sure knocked off a lot of rats and fleas. I never thought I'd be one of them." He was silent.

Chandler admired his courage very much. The man had fallen asleep.

Chandler looked at the others. "You going to let them kill us without a struggle?" he demanded.

The remaining Hawaiian was the only one to answer. He said, "You just don't know how much *pilikia* you're in. It isn't what we *let* them do."

"We'll see," Chandler promised grimly. "They're only human. I haven't given up yet."

BUT in the end he could not save himself; it was the girl who saved him. That night Chandler tossed in troubled sleep, and woke to find himself standing, walking toward the Tri-Pacer. The sun was just beginning to pink the sky and no one else was moving. "Sorry, love," he apologized to himself. "You probably need to bathe and shave, but I don't know how. Shave, I mean." He giggled. "Anyway, you'll find everything you need at my house."

He climbed into the plane. "Ever fly before?" he asked himself. "Well, you'll love it. Here we go. *Close* the door . . . *snap* the belt . . . *turn* the switch." He admired the practiced ease with which his body started the motor, raced it with a critical eye on the instruments, turned the plane and lifted it off, up, into the rising sun.

"Oh, dear. You *do* need a bath," he told himself, wrinkling his nose humorously. "No harm. I've the nicest tub — pink, deep — and nine kinds of bath salts. But I wish you weren't so tired, love, because it's a long flight and you're wearing me out." He

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was silent as he bent to the correct compass heading and cranked a handle over his head to adjust the trim. "Koitska's going to be so *huhu*," he said, smiling. "Never fear, love, I can calm him down. But it's easier to do with you in one piece, you know, the other way's too late."

He was silent for a long time, and then his voice began to sing.

They were songs from Rosalie's own musical comedies. Even with so poor an instrument as Chandler's voice to work with, she sang well enough to keep both of them entertained while his body brought the plane in for a landing; and so Chandler went to live in the villa that belonged to Rosalie Pan.

XII

"LOVE," she said, "there are worse things in the world than keeping me amused when I'm not busy. We'll go to the beach again one day soon, I promise." And she was gone again.

I'm not busy. We'll go to the

Chandler was a concubine — not even that; he was a male geisha, convenient to play gin rummy with, or for company on the surfboards, or to make a drink.

He did not quite know what to make of himself. In bad times one hopes for survival. He had hoped; and now he had survival, perfumed and cushioned, but on what mad terms! Rosalie was a pretty girl, and a good-humored one. She was right. There were worse things in the world than being her companion; but Chandler could not adjust himself to the role.

It angered him when she got up from the garden swing and locked herself in her room — for he knew that she was not sleeping as she lay there, though her eyes were closed and she was motionless. It infuriated him when she casually usurped his body to bring an ashtray to her side, or to stop him when his hands presumed. And it drove him nearly wild to be a puppet with her friends working his strings.

He was that most of all. One exec who wished to communicate with another cast about for an available human proxy nearby. Chandler was that for Rosie Pan: her telephone, her social secretary, and on occasion he was the garment her dates put on. For Rosalie was one of the few execs who cared to conduct any major part of her life in her own skin. She liked dancing. She enjoyed dining out. It was her pleasure to display herself to the worshippers at Luigi the Wharf Rat's and to speed down the long

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combers on a surfboard. When another exec chose to accompany her it was Chandler's body which gave the remote "date" flesh.

He ate very well indeed — in surprising variety. He drank heavily sometimes and abstained others. Once, in the person of a Moroccan exec, he smoked an opium pipe; once he dined on roasted puppy. He saw many interesting things and, when Rosalie was occupied without him, he had the run of her house, her music library, her pantry and her books. He was not mistreated. He was pampered and praised, and every night she kissed him before she retired to her own room with the snap-lock on the door.

He was miserable.

He prowled the house in the nights after she had left him, unable to sleep. It had been bad enough on Hilo, under the hanging threat of death. But then, though he was only a slave, he was working at something that used his skill and training.

Now? Now a Pekingese could do nearly all she wanted of him. He despised in himself the knowledge that with a Pekingese's cunning he was contriving to make himself indispensable to her—her slippers fetched in his teeth, his silky mane by her hand to stroke — if not these things in actuality, then their very near equivalents.

But what else was there for him?

There was nothing. She had spared his life from Koitska, and if he offended her Koitska's sentence would be carried out.

Even dying might be better than this, he thought.

Indeed, it might be better even to go back to Honolulu and life.

IN THE morning he woke to find himself climbing the wide, carpeted steps to her room. She was not asleep; it was her mind that was guiding him.

He opened the door. She lay with a feathery coverlet pulled up to her chin, eyes open, head propped on three pillows; as she looked at him he was free. "Something the matter, love? You fell asleep sitting up."

"Sorry." She would not be put off. She made him tell her his resentments. She was very understanding and very sure as she said, "You're not a dog, love. I won't have you thinking that way. You're my friend. Don't you think I need a friend?" She leaned forward. Her nightgown was very sheer; but Chandler had tasted that trap before and he averted his eyes. "You think it's all fun for us. I understand. Tell me, if you thought I was doing important work — oh, *crucial* work, love — would you feel a little easier? Because I am.

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We've got the whole work of the island to do, and I do my share. We've got our plans to make and our future to provide for. There are so few of us. A single H-bomb could kill us all. Do you think it isn't work, keeping that bomb from ever coming here? There's all Honolulu to monitor, for they know about us there. We can't like some disgusting nitwits like your Society of Slaves destroy *us*. There's the problems of the world to see to. Why," she said with pride, "we've solved the whole Indian-Pakistani population problem in the last two months. They'll not have to worry about famine again for a dozen generations! We're working on China now; next Japan; next — oh, all the world. We'll have three-quarters of the lumps gone soon, and the rest will have space to breathe in. It's work!"

She saw his expression and said earnestly, "No, don't think that! You call it murder. It is, of course. But it's the surgeon's knife. We're quicker and less painful than starvation, love . . . and if some of us enjoy the work of weeding out the unfit, does that change anything? It does not! I admit some of us are, well, *mean*. But not all. And we're improving. The new people we take in are better than the old."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment.

Then she shook her head. "Never mind," she said — apparently to herself. "Forget it, love. Go like an angel and fetch us both some coffee."

LIKE AN angel he went . . . not, he thought bitterly, like a man.

She was keeping something from him, and he was too stubborn to let her tease him out of his mood. "Everything's a secret," he complained, and she patted his cheek.

"It has to be that way." She was quite serious. "This is the biggest thing in the world. I'm fond of you, love, but I can't let that interfere with my duty."

"Shto, Rosie?" said Chandler's mouth thickly.

"Oh, there you are, Andrei," she said, and spoke quickly in Russian.

Chandler's brows knotted in a scowl and he barked: *"Nyeh mozhet bit!"*

"Andrei . . ." she said gently. *"Ya vas sprashnivayoo . . ."*

"Nyet!"

"No Andrei . . ."

Rumble, grumble; Chandler's body twitched and fumed. He heard his own name in the argument, but what the subject matter was he could not tell. Rosalie was coaxing; Koitska was refusing. But he was weakening. After minutes Chandler's shoulders

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shrugged; he nodded; and he was free.

"Have some more coffee, love," said Rosalie Pan with an air of triumph.

Chandler waited. He did not understand what was going on. It was up to her to enlighten him, and finally she smiled and said: "Perhaps you can join us, love. Don't say yes or no. It isn't up to you . . . and besides you can't know whether you want it or not until you try. So be patient a moment."

Chandler frowned; then felt his body taken. His lips barked: *"Khorashaw!"* His body got up and walked to the wall of Rosalie's room. A picture on the wall moved aside and there was a safe. Flick, flick, Chandler's own fingers dialed a combination so rapidly that he could not follow it. The door of the safe opened.

And Chandler was free, and Rosalie excitedly leaping out of the bed behind him, careless of the wisp of nylon that was her only garment, crowding softly, warmly past him to reach inside the safe. She lifted out a coronet very like her own.

She paused and looked at Chandler.

"You can't do anything to harm us with this one, love," she warned. "Do you—understand—that? I mean, don't get the idea that you can tell anyone anything. Or do something violent. You can't. I'll be right with you, and Koitska will be monitoring the transmitter." She handed him the coronet. "Now, when you see something interesting, you move right in. You'll see how. It's the easiest thing in the world, and — Oh, here. Put it on."

Chandler swallowed with difficulty.

She was offering him the tool that had given the execs the world. A blunter, weaker tool than her own, no doubt. But still it was power beyond his imagining. He stood there frozen as she slipped it on his head. Sprung electrodes pressed gently against his temples and behind his ears. She touched something . . .

Chandler stood motionless for a moment and then, without effort, floated free of his own body.

FLOATING. Floating; a jellyfish floating. Trailing tentacles that whipped and curled, floating over the sandbound claws and chitin that clashed beneath, floating over the world's people, and them not even knowing, not even seeing . . .

Chandler floated.

He was up, out and away. He was drifting. Around him was no-color. He saw nothing of space or size, he only saw, or did not see but felt-smelled-tasted, peo-

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ple. They were the sandbound. They were the creatures that crawled and struggled below, and his tentacles lashed out at them.

Beside him floated another. The girl? It had a shape, but not a human shape — a pair of great projecting spheres, a cinctured area-rule shape. Female. Yes, undoubtedly the girl. It waved a member at him and he understood he was beckoned. He followed.

Two of sandbound ones were ahead.

The female shape slipped into one, he into the other. It was as easy to invest this form with his own will as it was to command the muscles of his hand. They looked at each other out of sandbound eyes. "You're a boy!" Chandler laughed. The girl laughed: "You're an old washerwoman!" They were in a kitchen where fish simmered on an electric stove. The boy-Rosie wrinkled his-her nose, blinked and was empty. Only the small almond-eyed boy was left, and he began to cry convulsively. Chandler understood. He floated out after her.

This way, this way, she gestured. A crowd of mudbound figures. She slipped into one, he into another. They were in a bus now, rocking along an inland road, all men, all roughly dressed. Laborers going to clear a new section of Oahu of its split-level debris, Chandler thought, and looked for the girl in one of the men's eyes, could not find her, hesitated and — floated. She was hovering impatiently. This way!

He followed, and followed.

They were a hundred people doing a hundred things. They lingered a few moments as a teen-age couple holding hands in the twilight of the beach. They fled from a room where Chandler was an old woman dying on a bed, and Rosalie a stolid, uncaring nurse beside her. They played follow-the-leader through the audience of a Honolulu movie theater, and sought each other, laughing, among the fish stalls of King Street. Then Chandler turned to Rosalie to speak and . . . it all went out . . . the scene disappeared . . . he opened his eyes, and he was back in his own flesh.

He was lying on the pastel pile rug in Rosalie's bedroom.

He got up, rubbing the side of his face. He had tumbled, it seemed. Rosalie was lying on the bed.

In a moment she opened her eyes.

"Well, love?"

He said hoarsely, "What made it stop?"

She shrugged. "Koitska turned you off. Tired of monitoring us, I expect — it's been an hour. I'm

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surprised his patience lasted this long."

She stretched luxuriously, but he was too full of what had happened even to see the white grace of her body. "Did you like it, love? Would you like to have it forever?"

XIII

FOR NINE days Chandler's status remained in limbo. He spent that day in a state of numb bemusement, remembering the men and women he had worn like garments, appalled and exhilarated. He did not see Rosalie again that day, she kept to her room and he locked out. He was still a lapdog, but a lapdog with a dream dangling before him. He went to sleep that night thinking that he was a dog who might become a god, and he had eight days left.

The next day Rosalie wheedled another hour of the coronet from Koitska. They explored the ice caves on Mount Rainier in the bodies of two sick, starving hermits and wandered arm in arm near the destroyed International Bridge at Niagara, breathing the spray of the unchanging Falls. He had seven days left.

They passed like a dream. He saw a great deal of the inner workings of the exec, more than before. He had privileges. He was up for membership in the club. Rosalie had proposed him. He talked with two Czechoslovakian ballet dancers in their persons, and a succession of heavily accented Russians and Poles and Japanese through the mouth of the beach boy who came to tend Rosalie's garden. He thought they liked him and was pleased that he penetrated where he had not been allowed before . . . until he realized that these freedoms were in themselves a threat. They allowed him this contact so that they could look him over. If they rejected him they would have to kill him, because he had seen too much. But by then a week had passed, and another day, and though he did not know it he had only one day left. Rosalie did what she could to make the days of waiting easy for him.

"Embarrassing, isn't it? I went through it myself, love. Come have a drink."

"When will I know?" he demanded fretfully.

"Well." She hesitated. "I don't suppose there's any harm in telling you, love, under the circumstances —"

He knew what the circumstances were.

"I guess I can tell you. You need just over seven hundred votes to come in. You've got —" Her eyes glazed for a moment.

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She was looking through some clerk's eyes, somewhere on the island. "You've got about a hundred and fifty so far. Takes time, doesn't it? But it's worth it in the end."

"How many 'no' votes?"

'None." She said gently, "You'll never have but one, love, because that's all it takes."

He stared. The girl gook took up his hand and kissed it lightly. "One blackball's enough, yes, but never fear. Rosie's on your side."

RESTLESSLY Chandler stood up and made himself another drink. His head was beginning to buzz. They had been drinking on her sun terrace since early afternoon.

Rosalie came up beside him soothingly. "I know how you feel. Want me to tell you about when I went through it?"

"Sure," he said, stirring the ice around in the glass and drinking it down. He made another drink absently, hardly hearing what she said, although the sound of her voice was welcome.

"Oh, that lousy headdress! It weighed twenty pounds, and they put it on with hatpins." He caressed her absently. He had figured out that she was talking about the night New York was bombed. "I was in the middle of the big first-act curtain number when —" her face was strained, even after years, even now that she was herself one of the godlike ones — "when something took hold of me. I ran off the stage and right out through the front door. There was a cab waiting. As soon as I got in I was free, and the driver took off like a lunatic through the tunnel, out to Newark Airport. I tell you, I was scared! At the toll booth I screamed but my — friend — let go of the driver for a minute, smashed a trailer-truck into a police car, and in the confusion we got away. He took me over again at the airport. I ran bare as a bird into a plane that was just ready to take off. The pilot was under control . . . We flew eleven hours, and I wore that damn feather headdress all the way."

She held out her glass for a refill. Chandler busied himself slicing a lime for her drink. Now she was talking about her friend. "I hadn't seen him in six years. I was just a kid, living in Islip. He was with a Russian trade commission next door, in an old mansion. Well, he was one of the ones, back in Russia, that came up with these." She touched her coronet. "So," she said brightly, "he put me up for membership and by and by they gave me one. You see? It's all very simple, except the waiting."

Chandler pulled her down on

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the couch beside him and made a toast. "Your friend."

"He's a nice guy," she said moodily, sipping her drink. "You know how careful I am about getting exercise and so on? It's partly because of him. You would have liked him, love, only — well, it turned out that he liked me well enough, but he began to like what he could get through the coronet a lot more. He got fat. A lot of them are awfully fat, love," she said seriously. "That's why they need people like me. And you. Replacements. Heart trouble, liver trouble, what can they expect when they lie in bed day in and day out, taking their lives through other people's bodies? I won't let myself go that way . . . It's a temptation. You know, almost every day I find some poor woman on a diet and spend a solid hour eating creampuffs and gravies. How they must hate me!"

She grinned, leaned back and kissed him.

Chandler put his arms around the girl and returned the kiss, hard. She did not draw away. She clung to him, and he could feel in the warmth of her body, the sound of her breath that she was responding. The drink made him reckless; the last two weeks made him doubtful; he was torn. He could tell that there was no resistance in her body, but the coronet made it in doubt; she could fling him away from her with one touch of the mind. Yet she didn't do it —

"Vi myenya zvali?" his own voice demanded, harsh and mocking.

THE GIRL tried to push him away. Her eyes were bright and huge, staring at him. "Andrei!"

"Da, Andrei! Kok eto dosadno!"

"Andrei, please. I know that you are —"

"Filthy!" screamed Chandler's voice. "How can you? I do not allow this carrion to touch you so — not vot is mine — I do not allow him to live!" And Chandler dropped her and leaped to his feet. He fought. He struggled; but only in his mind, and helplessly; his body carried him out of the room, running and stumbling, out into the drive, into her waiting car and away.

He drove like a madman on roads he had never seen before. The car's gears bellowed pain at their abuse, the tires screamed.

Chandler, prisoned inside himself, recognized that touch. Koitska! He knew who Rosalie Pan's lover had been. If he had been in doubt his own voice, raucous and hysterical with rage, told him the truth. All that long drive it

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screamed threats and obscenities at him, in Russian and tortured English.

The car stopped in front of the TWA facility and, still prisoned, his body hurried in, bruising itself deliberately against every doorpost and stick of furniture. "I could have smashed you in the car!" his voice screamed hoarsely. "It is too merciful. I could have thrown you into the sea! It is not painful enough."

In the garage his body stopped and looked wildly around. "Knives, torches," his lips chanted. "Shall I gouge out eyes? Slit throat?"

A jar of battery acid stood on a shelf, *"Da, da!"* screamed Chandler, stumbling toward it. "One drink eh? And I von't even stay vith you to feel it, the pain — just a moment — then it eats the gut, the long slow dying . . ." And all the time the body that was Chandler's was clawing the cap off the jar, tilting it —

He dropped the jar, and leaped aside instinctively as it splintered at his feet.

He was free!

Before he could move he was seized again, stumbled, crashed into a well —

And was free again.

He stood waiting for a moment, unable to believe it; but he was still free. The alien invader did not seize his mind. There was no sound. No one moved. No gun fired at him, no danger threatened.

He *was* free; he took a step, turned, shook his head and proved it.

He was free and, in a moment, realized that he was in the building with the fat bloated body of the man who wanted to murder him, the body that in its own strength could scarcely stand erect.

It was suicide to attempt to harm an exec. He would certainly lose his life — except — that was gone already anyhow; he had lost it. He had nothing left to lose.

XIV

CHANDLER loped silently up the stairs to Koitska's suite.

Halfway up he tripped and sprawled, half stunning himself against the stair rail. It had not been his own clumsiness, he was sure. Koitska had caught at his mind again, but only feebly. Chandler did not wait. Whatever was interfering with Koitska's control, some distraction or malfunction of the coronet or whatever, Chandler could not bank on its lasting.

The door was locked.

He found a heavy mahogany chair, with a back of solid carved wood. He flung it onto his shoul-

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ders, grunting, and ran with it into the door, a bull driven frantic, lunging out of its querencia to batter the wall of the arena. The door splintered.

Chandler was gashed with long slivers of wood, but he was through the door.

Koitska lay sprawled along his couch, eyes staring.

Alive or dead? Chandler did not wait to find out but sprang at him hands outstreched. The staring eyes flickered; Chandler felt the pull at his mind. But Koitska's strength was almost gone. The eyes glazed, and Chandler was upon him. He ripped the coronet off and flung it aside, and the huge bulk of Koitska swung paralytically off the couch and fell to the floor.

The man was helpless. He lay breathing like a steam engine, one eye pressed shut against the leg of a coffee table, the other looking up at Chandler.

Chandler was panting almost as hard as the helpless mass at his feet. He was safe for a moment. At the most for a moment, for at any time one of the other execs might dart down out of the mind-world into the real, looking at the scene through Chandler's eyes and surely deducing what would be no more to his favor than the truth. He had to get away from there. If he seemed busy in another room perhaps they would go away again. Chandler turned his back on the paralyzed monster to flee. It would be even better to try to lose himself in Honolulu — if he could get that far — he did not in his own flesh know how to fly the helicopter that was parked in the yard or he would try to get farther still.

But as he turned he was caught.

CHANDLER turned to see Koitska lying there, and screamed.

His eyes were staring at Koitska. It was too late. He was possessed by someone, he did not know whom. Though it made little enough difference, he thought, watching his own hands reach out to touch the staring face.

His body straightened, his eyes looked around the room, he went to the desk. "Love," he cried to himself, "what's the matter with Koitska? Write, for God's sake!" And he took a pencil in his hand and was free.

He hesitated, then scribbled: *I don't know. I think he had a stroke. Who are you?*

The other mind slipped tentatively into his, scanning the paper. "Rosie, you idiot, who did you think?" he said furiously. "What have you done?"

Nothing, he began instinctive-

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ly, then scratched the word out. Briskly and exactly he wrote: *He was going to kill me, but he had some kind of an attack. I took his coronet away. I was going to run.*

"Oh, you fool," he told himself shrilly a moment later. Chandler's body knelt beside the wheezing fat lump, taking its pulse. The faint, fitful throb meant nothing to Chandler; probably meant nothing to Rosie either, for his body stood up, hesitated, shook its head. "You've done it now," he sobbed, and was surprised to find he was weeping real tears. "Oh, love, why? I could have taken care of Koitska — somehow — No, maybe I couldn't," he said frantically, breaking down. "I don't know what to do. Do you have any ideas — outside of running?"

It took him several seconds to write the one word, but it was really all he could find to write. *No.*

His lips twisted as his eyes read the word. "Well," he said practically, "I guess that's the end, love. I mean, I give up."

He got up, turned around the room. "I don't know," he told himself worriedly. "There might be a chance — if we could hush this up. I'd better get a doctor. He'll have to use your body, so don't be surprised if there's someone and it isn't me. Maybe he can pull Andrei through. Maybe Andrei'll forgive you then — Or if he dies," Chandler's voice schemed as his eyes stared at the rasping motionless hulk, "we can say you broke down the door to *help* him. Only you'll have to put his coronet back on, so it won't look suspicious. Besides that will keep anyone from occupying him. Do that, love. Hurry." And he was free.

Gingerly Chandler crossed the floor.

He did not like to touch the dying animal that wheezed before him, liked even less to give it back the weapon that, if it had only a few moments of sentience again, it would use to kill him. But the girl was right. Without the helmet any wandering curi- himself. The helmet would shield him from —

Would shield anyone from —

Would shield Chandler himself from possession if he used it!

He did not hesitate. He slipped the helmet on his head, snapped the switch and in a moment stood free of his own body, in the gray, luminous limbo, looking down at the pallid traceries that lay beneath.

HE DID NOT hesitate then either.

He did not pause to think or plan; it was as though he had planned every step, in long detail,

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over many years. Chandler for at least a few moments had the freedom to battle the execs on their own ground, the freedom that any mourning parent or husband in the outside world would know well how to use.

Chandler also knew. He was a weapon. He might die — but it was not a great thing to die, millions had done it for nothing under the rule of the execs, and he was privileged to be able to die trying to kill *them*.

He stepped callously around the hulk on the floor and found a door behind the couch, a door and a hall, and at the end of that hall a large room that had once perhaps been a message center. Now it held rack after rack of electronic gear. He recognized it without elation. It had had to be there.

It was the main transmitter for all the coronets of the exec.

He had only to pull one switch — that one there — and power would cease to flow. The coronets would be dead. The execs would be only humans. In five minutes he could destroy enough parts so that it would be at least a week's work to build it again, and in a week the slaves in Honolulu — somehow he could reach them, somehow he would tell them of their chance — could root out and destroy every exec on all the islands.

Of course, there was the stand-by transmitter he himself had helped to build.

He realized tardily that Koitska would have made some arrangement for starting that up by remote control.

He put down the tool-kit with which he had been advancing on the racks of transistors, and paused to think.

He was a fool, he saw after a moment. He could not destroy this installation — not yet — not until he had used it. He remembered to sit down so that his body would not crash to the floor, and then he sent himself out and up, to scan the nearby area.

There was no one there, nobody within a mile or more, except the feeble glimmer that was dying Koitska. He did not enter that body. He returned to his own long enough to barricade the door — it had a strong-looking lock, but he shouldered furniture against it too — and then he went up and out, grateful to Rosalie, who had taught him how to navigate in the curious world of the mind, flashing across water, under a mind-controlled plane, to the island of Hilo.

There *had* to be someone near the stand-by installation.

He searched; but there was no one. No one in the building. No one near the ruined field. No one

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in the village of the dead nearby. He was desperate; he became frantic; he was on the point of giving up, and then he found — someone? But it was a personality feebler than stricken Koitska's, a bare swampfire glow.

No matter. He entered it.

AT ONCE he screamed silently and left it again. He had never known such pain. A terrifying fire in the belly, a thunder past any migraine in the head, a thousand lesser aches and woes in every member. He could not imagine what person lived in such distress; but grimly he forced himself to enter again.

Moaning — it was astonishing how thick and animal-like the man's voice was — Chandler forced his borrowed body stumbling through the jungle. Time was growing very short. He drove it gasping at an awkward run across the airfield, dodged around one wrecked plane and blundered through the door. The pain was intolerable. He was hardly able to maintain control.

Chandler stretched out the borrowed hand to pick up a heavy wrench even while he thought. But the hand would not grasp. He brought it to the weak, watering eyes. The hand had no fingers. It ended in a ball of scar tissue. The left hand was nearly as misshapen.

Panicked, Chandler retreated from the body in a flash, back to his own; and then he began to think.

It was, it had to be, the creature he had seen in the village of the dead. A leper. One of the few who escaped from the colony at Molokai. Chandler drove himself back to that body and, though it could not work well, he could make it turn a frequency dial, using its clubbed hands like sticks. He could make it throw a switch. He then caused it to place the toothed edge of a rusting saw on the ground and strike at it with its throat in a sort of reverse guillotine. Chandler could not see that he had a choice; he dared not have that creature left where it might be seized the moment he quit its body. It was better dead.

After that it all became easy.

In his own body he destroyed the installation in Oahu. A few minutes at Koitska's work bench, and he had changed the frequency on his own coronet to transmit on the new band the leper's touch had given the Hilo equipment.

He worked rapidly and without errors, one ear cocked for the sound of someone coming to threaten what he was doing (the sound never came), impatient to get the job done.

He was very impatient, for when he was done he would be the only exec.

And the execs would be only slaves.

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XV

CHANDLER strolled out of the TWA building, very tired.

It was dawn. His job was done. He carried the coronet, the only working coronet in the world, in his hand. He had spent the night killing, killing, killing, and blood had washed away his passions; he was spent. He had killed every exec he could find, in widening circles from the building where his body lay. He had slit his dozen throats and fired bullets into his hundred hearts and hundred brains; he had entered bodies only long enough to feel for a coronet, and if it was there the body was doomed; and he stopped only when it occurred to him he wasn't even doing that much any more. He had probably killed some dozens of slaves, as well as all the execs in reach. And when he stopped the orgy of killing he had made one last search of the nearer portions of the island and found no one alive, and he had then realized that one of the closest execs had been Rosalie Pan.

He knew that in a while he would feel very badly for having killed that girl (which could she have been? The one with the shotgun in the mouth? The one whose intestines he had spilled with a silver letteropener in a whim of hara-kiri?), but just now he was too worn.

He was Chandler the giant killer, who had destroyed the creatures who had destroyed a world, but he was all tired out. He poked at the filigree of the coronet absently, as a man might caress the pretty rug which once had been the skin of a tiger that almost killed him. It was all that was left of the exec power. Who held this single coronet still held the world.

Of course, said a sly and treasonable voice in a corner of his mind, the job was not really done.

Not quite. Not all.

The job would not be done until it was impossible for anyone to find enough of the installations to be able to reconstruct them.

And then, said the voice, while Chandler stared at the dawn, listening, what about the *good* things the exec had done? Would he not be foolish to throw away so casually this one, unique chance to right every imaginable wrong the world might do him?

Chandler went back into the building and brewed some strong black coffee. While it was bubbling on the stove he slipped the coronet back atop his head. Only for a while, he promised. A very little while. He pledged himself solemnly that it would be just long enough to clean up all loose ends — not a moment longer, he pledged. And knew that he was lying.

— FREDERIK POHL

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

AN ASSUMPTION can seem like fact merely by constant repetition. That this is startlingly true has been demonstrated by Isaac Asimov in his latest book, the title of which supplies the finest three-word description of science fiction that I have yet seen and just barely lacks the snappy oomph that would entice a prospective mag publisher to gobble it up as the title of a new SF entry.

Fact and Fancy by Asimov, under Doubleday's imprint, is a collection of speculative essays, mainly from *F&SF*, that represent his closest approach to the fictional sphere since he took up science popularization in earnest.

Asimov has clearly had keen enjoyment from taking certain stock assumptions from the repertoire of the SF hack writer and subjecting them to keen scrutiny under the pitiless light of present scientific knowledge.

For example, one of the most glamorous settings used for years has been, "The Planet of the Double Sun." How many stories have you and I read with this

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background? Now along comes Spoilsport Asimov and proceeds to knock this exotic picture out of our heads with hard facts. He takes as example Alpha Centauri A, which is Earth's twin in temperature, brightness and mass, and which actually is the major partner in an existing binary system. In terms of our solar system, Alpha Centauri B, the minor partner, revolves in the orbit of Uranus, two billion miles out, so that even Saturn would be nearer to A than to B. And since A has eight times the gravitational attraction of B, no trouble should arise from that score. Since the diameter of B is 430,000 miles, this would seem to provide the Double Sun of the old-fashioned SF tale.

But *would* B appear like another sun? It would *not!* Asimov does the arithmetic and finds that a diameter of 430,000 miles at a distance of two billion miles subtends an angle of 45 seconds of arc. To the naked eye, Sun B would be just about the apparent size of Jupiter! The one small feature redeemed from this rude shattering of one of my favorite boyhood illusions is the fact that Sun B would be 150 times as bright as the full moon. But this is still only 1/3000th as bright as Sun A.

Q. How close *would* a star the size of our sun have to be to be seen as a disk? A. Not more than a billion miles. Considering that, even at the center of our galaxy, star distances average one light year, the possibility of double sun systems of dear memory is very dim indeed.

Incidentally, how big is the apparent size of the moon as seen from the earth's surface? This has been tossed into many stories also. The usual answer is given linearly and is therefore meaningless. Astonishingly, a quarter dollar, which the mind conceives of as quite small, held at a distance of nine feet, will just overlap the full moon, the mental image of which is quite large. Bang! Another punctured illusion!

Another startling demonstration of the tricks our senses play on us is the actual count of eye-visible stars in the jampacked firmament of a perfect night in the mountains. "Millions! Billions!" shouts Averageman, ignorant of the fact that there are only 3,000 stars in both hemispheres of magnitude 6.5 or brighter, the faintest star that can be detected with the unaided eye. Getting back to the moon, if at any particular time it were to be removed from the sky, how many visible stars would it have been obscuring? The odds are 33 to 1 that removal would reveal not one star behind it!

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The next sacred cow slaughtered by Asimov's merciless pen is the "familiar constellations" bit so familiar in space operas of yore, including, I'll bet a nine-foot quarter, Dr. Asimov's own. In deep space, our astronauts will view over two and one half times as many naked-eye stars due to the elimination of atmospheric absorption of 30% of starlight. All fine details of the "familiar constellations" will be drowned out by the light of thousands of additional stars.

In another chapter touchingly titled "The Sight of Home," Asimov calculates the maximum distance at which our future astronauts can lift their "tear-filled, homesick eyes to the alien heavens for a glimpse of home." This works out to sixty-five light years at the absolute threshhold of naked-eye visibility. In fact, the Alpha Centauri system, our closest neighbor in space, is the *only* one from which Sol can be seen as a first magnitude star! Thus, Sol can be seen at all from an absolute maximum of 1450 near-by star systems. A lot, but certainly a tiny handful in comparison with our galaxy's total population of a hundred billion stars.

Further speculation then leads Asimov to wonder just how bright our sun would have to be to be seen at increasingly greater distances. Sirius, far brighter than Sol, can be seen at a maximum distance of 325 light years and Capella 850 light years. Of the stars visible from Earth, though, the championship is held by Rigel, over 20,000 times as luminous as Sol. Rigel can be seen over a range of one-fifth the width of the galactic lens, more than 9,000 light years in any direction. Asimov's tear-filled Astronaut could say, "Oh, well, you can't see our Sun from here, but it's pretty close to Rigel, that star over there, the one you call Bjfxlpt."

As can be gathered from the above, good Dr. Asimov has let down his hair as he has never done in his other books aimed at a more general audience. He is among his own science-fictional friends and his free-wheeling joy is apparent.

In another chapter that hits close to the home of most of us in this field, he attempts to answer the question invariably put to him (and all other creators of SF or fantasy fiction): "Where do you get your crazy ideas?" He never succeeds in pinning down an answer but en route he develops some interesting thoughts on creativity and intellectual breakthroughs such as Darwin's.

I can think of no one better supplied with such an assortment

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of numerous and amazing facts, nor one better qualified to leap lightly over the enchanted threshold dividing Fact from Fancy as the author of these seventeen "speculative essays".

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION BY SCIENTISTS edited by Groff Conklin. Collier Books.

CONKLIN'S INSPIRATION has given us a fine example of flights of fancy by some of the most eminent dealers in fact of our time. It is more than a bit startling to see some of these names by-lining a piece of fiction: J.B.S. Haldane, Norbert Weiner, Julien Huxley, Leo Szilard. Others have been top-ranking SF authors for years; Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Chan Davis, Chad Oliver, the late Miles J. Breuer. Still others, when shorn of their literary pseudonyms, are names of prestige in their particular fields; John R. Pierce, Willy Ley, R. S. Richardson, the late Eric Temple Bell.

The most interesting thing about the scientists in this collection who are one-shot SF authors is that they all have one point in common; none of their stories are exalted flights of fancy. They have all resorted to the fictional approach to make some sharply pointed moral or ethical commentary on the abuse of knowledge.

The little playlet, *Pilot Lights of the Apocalypse*, by the noted nuclear physicist, the late Louis N. Ridenour, published only six months after Hiroshima, is one of the earliest and one of the most effective warnings against the possibility of push-button warfare that I've ever read.

Both J.B.S. Haldane's *The Gold-Makers* and Julian Huxley's *The Tissue-Culture King* are chase thrillers in which important discoveries are prostituted to selfish ends. *The Ultimate Catalyst* by Eric Temple Bell (John Taine) is also, but it is an unashamedly commercial piece from the Thirties.

The stories by the pros (Clarke, Asimov, Davis, Oliver) are polished jobs that are fair-representative but unexceptional. In fact, *What If . . .* by Isaac Asimov is more a piece of whimsical fantasy concerning alternate pasts than it is straight SF. Not so with *John Sze's Future*, a previously unpublished story by "J. J. Coupling" who is John R. Pierce, Bell Telephone's Director of Research for Communications Principles. It is a wry little yarn about a nuclear physicist, convinced of the power of psi over matter, dredged by unhappy mistake from the twentieth century by a psychologically orientated future in which physical scientists are regarded with an

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aversion usually reserved for mad dogs. He remains oblivious to the true nature of the scientific advances, attributing them to psi. There is a semantic mixup concerning psi and psy, and the future that his delighted preconceptions lead him to see is far removed from the drab and prosaic reality.

The author of *Learning Theory,* James McConnell, is a research psychologist. In his story, he rips to shreds one of the most sacred tools of his profession, the teaching and testing of lower animals by rewards and/or punishment. In his remarkably uncomfortable yarn that builds toward a high peak of frustration, he smashes the Learning Theory by casting his hero, himself a psychologist, in the role of the impotent lower animal under test.

Conklin has come up with an engrossing "idea" anthology.

Rating: ****½

NAKED TO THE STARS by Gordon R. Dickson. Pyramid Books "DORSAI!" by Dickson was a cracking good war story. So is *Naked to the Stars.*

Cal Truant, combat lieutenant, rather than discover what happened during sixteen hours of amnesia during combat, resigns from active duty and enlists in the detested Contact Service, a maneuver that creates doubts concerning his courage.

Contact Service, a branch of Earth's fighting Combat Service, is noncombatant and, more theoretically than actually, is responsible for initial (and preferably peaceful) alien contact.

Dickson makes his reader absorbedly aware that service in an organization dedicated to peace can require far more courage than mere combat.

Rating: ****

THE SUPER BARBARIANS by John Brunner. Ace Books. BRUNNER'S SUPER-BARBARIANS, as were the fouteenth century crusaders of Poul Anderson's delightfully tongue-in-cheek *The High Crusade,* are conquerors because of their employment of captured ships and weapons that are far beyond their true technological capabilities. Brunner's tale, however, is not a swashbuckler. He picks up the narrative thread some fifty years after Earth's defeat by the Vorrish and draws a picture of conqueror and conquered that is deliberately reminiscent of the roles of Roman conqueror and Greek slave of millenia past, or the Mongols and the superior civilization of the Chinese that ultimately engulfed the victors.

Rating: ***

— FLOYD C. GALE

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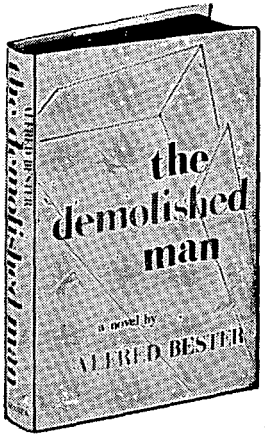

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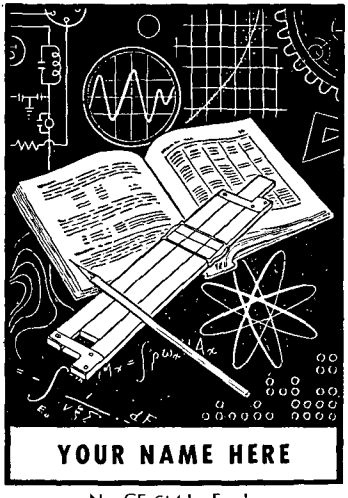

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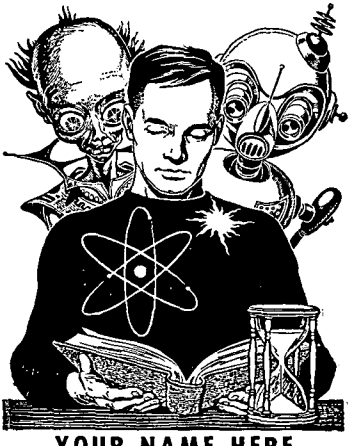

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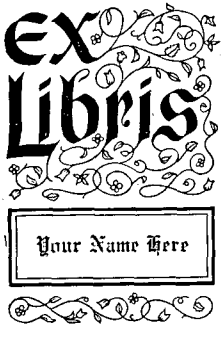

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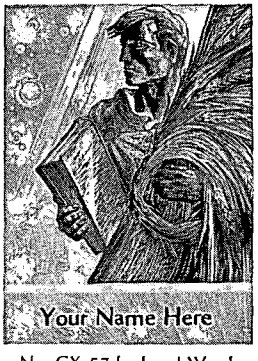

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